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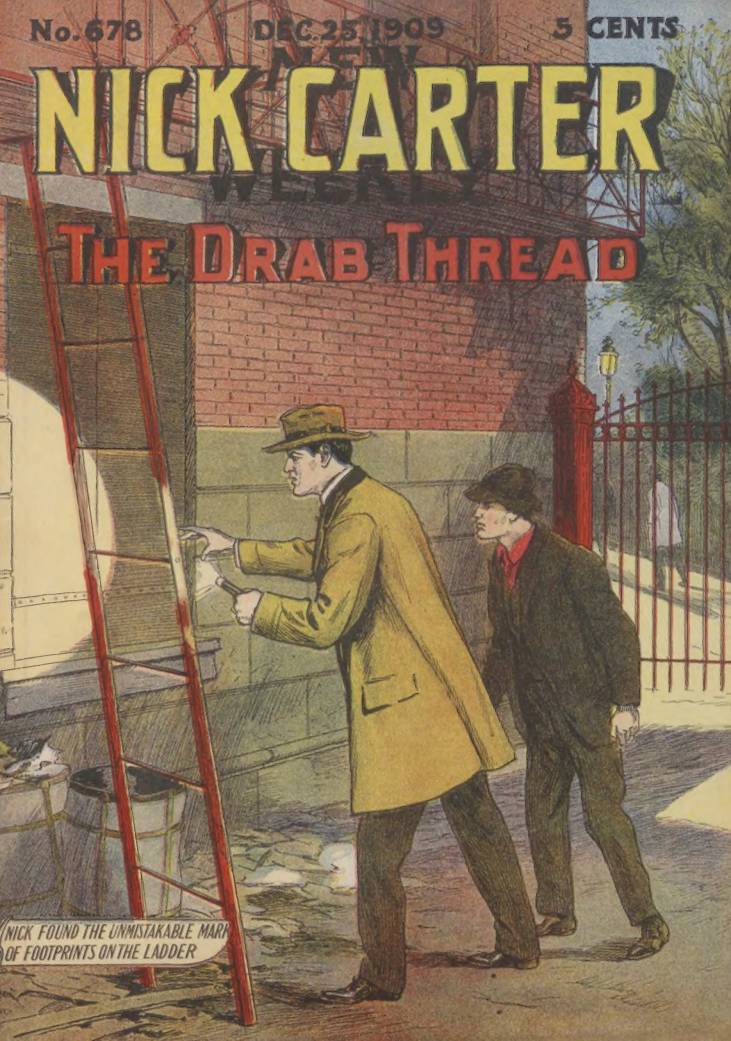
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE DRAB THREAD



NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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THE DRAB THREAD

OR,

Nick Carter Solves the Mystery of Room 313.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING PAPER.

"Mr. Rufus Badmington," announced Joseph.

Nick Carter glanced up from the card which his house servant and confidential man had brought him, and looked at the owner of it curiously. The place was the renowned detective's office, on the second floor rear of his Madison Avenue residence—a room which, though sparsely furnished, was plainly the workshop of a busy man.

Rufus Badmington, as he entered, glanced about the room curiously. He was a tall, rather portly man, with frosted hair, although he could not be far from fifty, but a mustache so jetty black that it suggested resort to a hair dye! His face was ruddy, and he was evidently a high liver. His gray-blue eyes were sharp enough in their gaze, but rather watery, and he wore, hung on his coat lapel, where they were handy, a pair of eyeglasses. He stepped softly—rather too catlike, in fact, for so big a man—his hands were very white, the fingers ornamented by a valuable ring or two. After shaking hands with the detective he accepted a chair. His handshake was a cold, fishy performance, and there was a measure of condescension in his manner that made Nick smile.

"I believe we have never chanced to meet before, Mr. Carter?" he said suavely. "But I have heard of your work, and have been told, by those who know, that you have done some really marvelous things."

"To do a marvel," said Nick, smiling, "is merely a matter of comparison. We see a man, who has been trained to a certain trade, turn out a product that we could not possibly turn out because we have not had his training. That seems marvelous to us. It is all in the course of the day's work to him!"

"I suppose so," said Mr. Badmington. "The marvel remains in our eyes, nevertheless. And in the matter to which I wish to call your attention, Mr. Carter, I believe I need a man who can perform the marvelous."

"Indeed? Let me hear what it is."

"You have read my card, Mr. Carter," said the visitor. "I am the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington. I presume you know us?"

"Chemists and wholesale dealers in drugs," said Nick promptly. "In business since eighteen-twenty, first as James Badmington, then as James Badmington & Son, and since the reorganization in eighteen seventy-eight, calling the corporation Badmington & Badmington. Yours is a close corporation, with no stock held outside of your family. Yes, Mr. Badmington, I know your firm."

"Humph! You plainly have a wonderful grasp of detail, Mr. Carter," said the visitor, looking at the other through his eyeglasses. "You have our history correctly."

"And that of several thousand other men and firms—in my card catalogue," explained the detective, with

a careless wave of his hand toward a filing cabinet. "Now, sir, what is your object in coming to see me?"

"I really am puzzled how to explain the matter lucidly," returned the man slowly. "But, briefly, we have had a serious loss."

"Indeed? You have been robbed?"

"Not of money," returned Mr. Badmington.

"Explain, please."

"Perhaps you have heard something of another loss our house has sustained?" said Badmington slowly, touching the broad stripe of crape that he wore on his coat sleeve.

"John Badmington, the man killed last week in Central Park, was related to you?" said Nick placidly.

"He was my older brother."

"An important member of your firm?"

"Oddly enough, no!" replied Badmington, with emphasis.

"Indeed?"

"I presume you are more or less familiar with the unfortunate end of my brother? It would be quite in your line, Mr. Carter?"

"It was a case handled by the police, I believe," replied Nick. "They arrested the murderer of your brother—let me see—his name was Hyburn?"

"Milton J. Hyburn," said Badmington. "He was crazy."

"Indeed?"

"I am convinced that he was not wholly sane. Still, I hope to see him go to the chair for his crime," declared the merchant, strongly moved. "He is a dangerous man, either at large or in prison."

"Wouldn't it be well, Mr. Badmington, for you to explain fully all about this man and your brother, and the matter which you propose to put in my hands?" suggested Nick. "We are wasting time."

"I will begin with my brother, Mr. Carter," said the visitor. He looked sternly at the detective, puffed out his cheeks, and finally blew a sigh along with this statement: "John Badmington was a bad egg!"

"Well, you knew him, sir," said Nick. "I accept your statement. But it is not enlightening to any appreciable degree."

Badmington scowled. Nick's light tone jarred on him.

"Let me continue, sir," he said, with dignity. "John Badmington was the black sheep of the family when he was young. He came to the verge of bringing disgrace on the family name and honor more than once before he was out of his teens. He was rusticated from college. He drank, he gambled, he sought fast company, and he got deeply into debt before he was twenty-five. Our father was James Badmington, second. He had hoped to take John into the business as a partner before he was at the age I speak of. John showed no inclination to settle down—and our father had to do the 'settling up' with John's creditors.

"So I," continued Rufus Badmington, "was given my brother's chance. I believe that John always compared our case to Jacob and Esau of Holy Writ. However that might be, I honestly became my father's partner, and the firm became 'James Badmington & Son'; and if my brother John sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, he did it of his own volition, and with his eyes wide open. The bargain was not of my seeking."

"These family affairs are interesting, Mr. Badmington," said Nick, "but are they to the point?"

"They are indeed to the point," declared the pompous gentleman. "If you are to aid in the matter which I expect to put in your hands, Mr. Carter, you must understand these things fully."

"Very well!"

"Understand that my brother John was not cheated out of any of his own share of my father's personal property. He had his own income while our father lived, and when the old gentleman died, John came in for an equal share of the personal estate of the deceased."

"I see," commented Nick.

"And when he would accept it, there had always been a position for him in the concern," added Badmington.

"An important position?" asked Nick quietly.

"A confidential position. He had no part, or lot, in the profits of Badmington & Badmington; but for years the firm paid him a salary—a living salary—for doing very little work."

"I see. He was kept on more in an honorary capacity than anything else?" said Nick shyly.

"Not much real work was demanded of him, it was true," admitted Mr. Badmington. "But his loose life and habits made it impossible for the house to depend upon his regular appearance at the offices. He would be absent for weeks at a time."

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Carter, are you quite familiar with the circumstances surrounding my unfortunate brother's death?"

"I have read what has appeared in the papers about it," said Nick.

"Quite an impossible story; quite ridiculous!" ejaculated Mr. Badmington. "The firm—I myself—deny knowing anything about this man Hyburn, who committed the atrocious deed."

"Let's see—did he claim to have any relations with Badmington & Badmington?" asked Nick, as though unfamiliar with the matter.

"He did make that claim, until his legal adviser shut his mouth," said the other bitterly.

"I suppose the whole story will not come out until the trial," said Nick.

"And then you may be sure it will be distorted by the prisoner's counsel in his favor—if possible."

"Oh, naturally!"

"I assure you that Badmington & Badmington know nothing about this Hyburn—save that he began to come to our offices about four months ago, and first asked for my brother John. John had disappeared some time before; I supposed he had gone on one of

his periodical sprees. I did not care to discuss a strictly family matter—and a scandalous matter at that—with a stranger, and I refused to talk with Hyburn. He came several times. He became threatening in his tone, and seemed to believe that John, or the firm, had got something of value from him. What it was I never could understand; and, frankly, I believe the fellow to have always been touched in his upper story. Of course," added Badmington, "this is in confidence to you, Mr. Carter. I would not wish anything I say to be prejudicial to the case the district attorney will make out against Hyburn. I shall probably be a witness against the criminal."

"I understand. Go on, please," said Nick.

"This Hyburn may really have had some cause of anger against John Badmington. At least, he believed he had. I never knew John's low associates, and few of them had ever found their way to the offices. In fact, I warned him, years ago, that if he allowed such people to trouble me, our intercourse would end immediately. John knew me! Although I was eight years his junior, I was always the stronger character. It was eminently fit that I, and not he, should have entered the firm as our father's partner."

Mr. Badmington made this statement with a wealth of unction that seemed to place the matter on an incontrovertible plane—there was nothing further to be said—there was no field for argument!

"Now, as I remarked, previous to Hyburn's first appearance at our office, John had vanished. It was almost time for one of his erratic fits of wandering, anyway. I had expected it, for he had been quite regular in his duties for some months before. But he had been so steady that I had been led, Mr. Carter, into doing a foolish thing. I had trusted my brother in a certain matter—a matter of great importance to the firm, but one that was not generally known to our other partners.

"This matter—we will call it a secret of the business, if you like—was contained in a certain paper. It was the result of much research and work on—on the part of several people—ahem!—and I could not begin to tell you the monetary value of the document, Mr. Carter! John knew of this matter. Indeed, he and I were really all who did know of it. At the time John disappeared he had that document in his keeping. I have every reason to know that he deliberately took it away with him."

"You quarreled over it?" interjected Nick.

"No, indeed, sir! We did not quarrel."

"Then why did your brother take the paper with him?"

"I do not know that he really intended to steal it from me," said the other earnestly. "I would not say that. He may have wished, sometime, to make me pay a round sum to get it back. He had blackmailed me before when he was drinking."

"Indeed!"

"But I do not wish to blacken the name of the dead," declared Mr. Badmington, with a smug seriousness. "In this case John may merely have wandered off on one of his sprees without thinking about the paper at all."

"But still having it with him?"

"Assuredly!"

"Well?" asked Nick, who was certainly interested now, and for a reason that Mr. Rufus Badmington could not imagine.

"John, as I said, had been gone some days before I ever set eyes on this Milton J. Hyburn, who is now in jail for the murder of my poor brother. And from that hour, until I was called to the morgue to identify the body of John, three days after he was killed, I did not set eyes on him, or have any communication with him."

"You mean with John?"

"Certainly."

"How long was this, may I ask?"

"A matter of nearly five months—quite four months, at the least."

"And you did not see or hear from him, either directly or indirectly?"

"I did not."

"You had no idea where he was?"

"No."

"And he was quite as one dead to you?"

"Exactly."

"But he had done the same thing before I suppose?"

"Why—yes."

"That is why there was no police inquiry sent out for John Badmington?" said Nick.

"Of course."

"You were not particularly worried about his safety?"

"Why—no, although he had never been gone so long a time before without communicating with me, at least."

"Was he well supplied with money when he disappeared?"

"Not that I know of. He may have had several hundred dollars. But that would not be much to him if he squandered it as usual."

"And you made no move to hunt for him?"

"I did not," said Badmington, rather brusquely. "Why should I? 'The bad penny always returns' is a proverb that had come to fit my brother John exactly."

"So you were amazed when the police called your attention to this murder, and you went to the morgue and found the unknown dead man to be your brother?"

"I was, indeed!" explained Rufus Badmington.

"Have the police traced his existence for the past five months—or since he left you?"

"They have been unable to. They do not even know where he was stopping when he was murdered. It looked to me, when I saw his clothing, that he must have fallen very low. Those were not his own clothes, and they were all very cheap and much worn."

"And his valuables were missing?"

"Every article. The police declare that Hyburn robbed John when he murdered him; and he has refused to tell anything about the things he stole, although he has confessed the crime of murder."

"I see. And what is it you want of me, Mr. Badmington?" asked Nick.

"Mr. Carter, what the police have not discovered, I wish to learn. I wish to know where my brother went, and what he did, during the months he was away at this particular time. I want to know, particularly, where he lived at the time he was struck down in the park by this madman, Hyburn. Hyburn robbed him of a few paltry pieces of jewelry, perhaps. But the most important thing John Badmington possessed," added the head of the firm of chemists, with eagerness, "I have reason to believe Hyburn did not get."

"You mean——"

"I want that paper John took away with him! I must have it—it must be recovered! If you are the intelligent man—the shrewd and far-seeing detective they say you are—I expect you to find that missing paper!"

CHAPTER II.

RUFUS ON THE GRILL.

Nick leaned back in his chair, placed his finger tips together and gazed at the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington with quizzical eyes.

"Proceed, please, Mr. Badmington," he said.

The visitor started and looked at Nick with puzzled expression.

"I don't just understand you, Mr. Carter," he said.

"You remarked that you expected me to find this important document that your brother chanced to carry away with him when he went off four or five months ago."

"That is my object in coming to you and telling you my story," said the pompous man.

"But you haven't told me all your story yet," Nick asserted.

"I—I have given you the salient points, sir," declared Badmington.

"You have sketched the matter—yes. I want details. I want to probe. I want to know as much of the affair as you would tell your attorney, for instance."

"Sir! Do you intimate that I have falsified any statement?"

"Not at all!"

"Or that I have ignored any important detail?"

"Not intentionally."

"Eh, sir!" ejaculated Mr. Badmington angrily.

"You must remember, sir, that I am to be the judge—and the only judge—of what is important. I will take your case, Mr. Badmington, but only on my own conditions."

The head of the great chemical company tried to look pleasant. He managed to put on a sickly smile as he said:

"I was told, Mr. Carter, that you were a man determined to have his own way, but that you were really a smart man."

"Whoever told you was certainly half right," declared Nick, smiling broadly.

"I *must* recover this document of which I have told you."

"I am ready to try to find it."

"And your conditions?"

"You must agree to a thorough cross-examination regarding this affair. I must understand every particular before I make a move in it."

The head of the chemical company looked at first somewhat startled. Then his natural ruddy color increased and his watery eyes sparkled angrily. He put up his eyeglasses again and stared at Nick.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Carter!" he burst out.

"I mean exactly what I say. I will take your case. But you must be subjected to a grueling examination that—perhaps—you may not like."

"But your words and tone imply a doubt of my honesty!" cried Badmington.

"Not at all. I have not succeeded in grasping the matter you bring before me, fully. I must do so before accepting the contract."

"What are the questions you wish to ask, Mr. Carter?" said Badmington gloomily, eying the detective.

"First of all, give me the details of your brother's death. The report in the paper, as you say, may not be exact."

"Oh, I can easily do that," returned the visitor, with evident relief. "It happened on September thirteen, as you probably know, about three o'clock in the afternoon."

"Yes. Go on, sir."

"John Badmington had been in the habit, it seems, of walking in the southern part of Central Park for a month past. He had been there so frequently within that time that several people had come to have a speaking acquaintance with him—you understand?—a passing acquaintance."

"I see. Did any of these people know his name?"

"No."

"And, of course, they did not know his abode?"

"No. It would seem that, wherever he was previously, he had about that time—a month or so ago—come into that neighborhood, for he was not seen in the park before."

"Quite right," commented Nick. "By the way, who were the witnesses?"

"The—er—oh! you mean these men who knew him?"

"Yes."

"John Stemper, a policeman, on post at that point; Abram Gautier, a workman for the park department, and Mr. Bronson Robbins, who lives opposite the park, and is a very well-known gentleman, in the silk business on Broadway."

"These three men knew your brother?"

"By sight. They spoke to him when he passed. They did not know his name or anything about him."

"I see."

"On the afternoon in question," began Badmington again, and slowly, "my brother came across Fifty-ninth Street from the direction of the head of Sixth Avenue, and entered the park by the gateway beside the riding path. He spoke to Officer Stemper, who stood by that gateway. He went on down the path which leads under a bridge, as you probably know, Mr. Carter, and before he reached this arched bridge he saw and nodded to the man Gautier. Halfway beneath the bridge Mr. Robbins met him and spoke. Mr. Robbins was standing talking with the officer, and Gautier was still near, when a man ran up, only a few moments later, and declared that there was somebody murdered down under the bridge."

"Who was this man who discovered the murder?" asked Nick quickly.

"I understand that it was Coroner Niberg."

"I see."

"They all went back to the body, and it was John Badmington."

"None of them knew who he was, though?"

"No."

"How had he been killed?"

"There was some repair material stacked near by, and a red lantern had been left by the workmen to be lighted later and hung over the pile. It was afterward learned that the murderer seized this lantern, leaped the bridge railing, clambered down the abutments, and met John Badmington as he came from under the archway. There he struck him down with the lantern, killing him instantly."

"And you say the body had been robbed?"

"Supposedly. But the murderer, I am told, was very cautious in his work. He left the body seemingly undisturbed, but there was not a thing in John's pockets—and even the lining was torn out of the cap he wore."

"He removed everything that might easily identify him?"

"He did. John usually carried a very good watch with his initials engraved upon the back. And he wore a seal ring for years, too."

"I see. These things were gone?"

"Yes."

"Were they recovered when the murderer was captured?"

"Yes. Everything was found in his room where he lodged."

"Now, Mr. Badmington, why do you think your brother was murdered?"

"Because there was bad blood between him and this madman, Hyburn."

"Over what?"

"I could not state."

"You have no idea, then, why John Badmington was killed?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Do you think it was for his watch and ring?"

"That would seem hardly probable."

"Why not?" asked Nick quickly.

"I understand from the police that Hyburn was not without money, and as he had made no attempt to pawn the things belonging to John, it would not seem that robbery was his sole object."

"Why, then, was he robbed at all?"

"The police think it was to mystify them, so that John could not easily be identified. It seems, there was no clue to the murderer at first."

"How did they catch Hyburn finally?" asked Nick, with a covert smile.

"I do not know. But they did catch him, and he confessed."

"He confessed the crime?"

"So I understand."

"And his reason for committing it?"

"I don't know anything about that!" declared Badmington irritably. "There was some sort of a scandalous story in a yellow newspaper to the effect that Hyburn had been cheated out of a fortune by our firm, and had taken vengeance on John, and intended, if he had not been caught, to kill us all. It is ridiculous!"

"You mean the idea that he could kill all the Badmingtons is ridiculous?" suggested Nick.

"No! I mean that his assertion that we had ever cheated him out of a penny," cried the visitor.

"Then you think it was a private feud between Hyburn and your brother that brought about the lattter's death?"

"Hyburn was crazy. He doesn't know what he killed poor John for."

"That is your belief?"

"It is."

"But do you know positively that your brother had not done Hyburn some wrong?"

"I don't know anything about it!" declared Rufus Badmington, with disgust, "excepting that I am very positive the firm had no dealings with Milton J. Hyburn—and he can never prove such a charge if he makes it!"

There was a satisfaction in the tone Mr. Badmington used, and Nick noted it.

"But he might think he has?" suggested Nick.

"I can't help what a crazy man thinks," said Badmington brusquely.

"I mean that Hyburn might have thought he was dealing with the firm when he was dealing with your brother."

"What do you mean?" snapped the visitor. "John wasn't the firm. He held only a small salaried position with us."

"True. But Hyburn may not have known that. He may have had some dealings with John that he thought were really conducted in the firm's name."

"I know of no such dealings."

"But it may have been."

"Do you mean that my brother was a crook as well as a drunkard?" demanded Badmington angrily.

"You put it in a very harsh phrase, sir," said Nick quietly, but without withdrawing his question.

"Well, if he was," snarled Rufus Badmington, "the firm cannot be held responsible for any of John's deals. That is sure!"

"So I see," said Nick reflectively. "But there may be something in Hyburn's claim? He may have thought he was dealing with your firm because he met John Badmington?"

"I do not see the use of answering such questions!" declared Badmington, much angered. "They lead to nothing."

"I warned you, Mr. Badmington, that you might not be pleased by my line of inquiry," said Nick tartly. "Do you want me to drop it—and the case—right here?"

"No, no! Go on," said Badmington. "I suppose I can stand it if you consider it necessary."

"I do. My time is as valuable as your own." Badmington's eyes opened wide at that, and he showed plain doubt in his face. "You can be sure I waste no breath on these questions," said Nick dryly. To proceed: Your brother might have represented himself to Hyburn as empowered by the firm to close some deal that Hyburn was interested in. He may have cheated the fellow, and all without the knowledge of the partners, of course?"

"I suppose he could," grunted Mr. Rufus Badmington.

"Now! Did John get anything of value from Hyburn?"

"How do I know?" cried the other warmly.

"That is your question," returned Nick. "Suppose you confine yourself to answering mine and not propounding those of your own. It will save time."

Badmington looked about on the point of bursting. He certainly was not used to being talked to this way.

"Do you think John got anything of value from Hyburn?"

"I don't know!" growled Badmington.

"Might it not be that Hyburn was searching for something of more moment than John's watch and ring and money, when he so carefully went through his clothing after having struck him down in the park?"

"What are you getting at, Mr. Carter?"

"The truth, I hope," returned Nick sharply. "Will you answer my question?"

"I know nothing about it. I don't know what John could have carried that would be of importance to Hyburn—or to anybody else."

"Not even this paper that you are so desirous of finding, Mr. Badmington?" demanded Nick, suddenly sitting forward in his chair, and transfixing his visitor with a pointed forefinger. "Not even this document that you want me to make search for? How about it, Mr. Badmington—how about it?"

CHAPTER III.

AN ADMISSION.

For a moment Badmington was too angry to answer. Then he began to stammer and sputter, his face glowing, his watery eyes sparkling with wrath, and the words tumbling over each other in coming out of his mouth.

"I—I would not believe that I could be so insulted! You are an impudent charlatan, sir! I do not believe you have half the power, or the intelligence, that report gives you, Mr. Nicholas Carter! You—you dare to intimate that I—that the firm of Badmington & Badmington—would stoop to trickery and deceit? That we are dishonest——"

"Now, hold your horses, sir," advised Nick sharply. "You've said about all you'll want to beg my pardon for. Any more would be too bitter a dose to swallow."

"I tell you, sir——"

"And I tell you, Mr. Badmington, either to keep still, and retract what you have just said; or I will put both you and your case out of my house, neck and crop! Come, sir! What will you do?"

"Why—why—Mr. Carter! You have vilified me——"

"I have asked you questions that have hurt. I told you they would. But you are a witness on the stand, and you had better not talk back to the cross-exam-

iner," and Nick allowed his face to slip for a moment into a smile—though a grim one.

"I do not understand your conduct, Mr. Carter," said Badmington, after a while, mopping his face. "You certainly angered me beyond control. If I, in turn, angered—or insulted—you, I retract what I said."

"That will do," said Nick grimly. "We will go on with the examination. Was it, by any possibility, this paper you want me to search for, that Hyburn was after when he killed and robbed your brother?"

Badmington had had time to consider; and he was slow of speech now; but when he did speak, it was quite calmly.

"Let me understand you, Mr. Carter," he said. "You intimate that Hyburn had some right to the paper, that I am not willing to admit, and that——"

"Hold on!" commanded Nick promptly. "You are getting entirely out of the field of my inquiry. I said nothing of that kind."

"Then——"

"I merely asked your opinion on the possibility of Hyburn being after the same document that you wish to recover. I intimated nothing regarding his reason for desiring to obtain it, or whether he had a right to it, or whether John, or you, or the firm, had cheated him out of it. I want to identify the paper itself."

"Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Badmington, turning very red indeed, and seeing at once that he had gone too far and had suggested a possibility to the detective that it might have been as well to keep to himself!

"Well, what do you say?" queried Nick impatiently.

"I can say frankly I don't know. But as I told you, John Badmington was a bad egg. He might have misrepresented himself to the fellow——"

"To Hyburn?"

"Yes."

"In connection with this missing paper?"

Again Badmington's face betrayed his rage. But he swallowed, and swallowed hard, before he spoke.

"I cannot, of my own knowledge, connect Milton J. Hyburn with the missing document that my brother took away with him. He should have no part or lot in it, that I know of. But it was a paper that would be valuable to more than us—Badmington & Badmington."

"Yes?"

"Any experimenting chemist would have seen the value of the document—if he could have read it," added the man.

"Indeed?"

"I am not at all sure that John did not intend blackmailing me with the help of that paper. It would not be impossible."

"Well?"

"Or, he may have contemplated trying to sell the document to another firm. Hyburn might have been let into John's game. Yes! Milton J. Hyburn might have known of the missing paper, and he might have killed my brother for its possession——"

"And mightn't he have got it?" interposed Nick.

"No! He did not get it. I am convinced——"

"How are you convinced of that?" demanded the detective quickly.

"Well—I have that feeling," said Badmington.

"Explain your reason for either feeling, or saying that," said Nick.

"I declare, Mr. Carter! You annoy me."

"Please answer my question, Mr. Badmington," said Nick wearily. "Now, why are you so sure that Hyburn did not get that paper away from your brother?"

"I don't believe John carried it about with him," said Badmington lamely.

"Your reason?"

"Confound it all, sir! I have no reason!" declared the gentleman.

"That can hardly be so, sir," said Nick calmly. "You are a reasonable man—a logical man. You never do a thing, or believe a thing, without having a reason."

The head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington looked pleased. Nick could not have artfully chosen any way of flattering the man that would have reached him so easily. There was slyness in his look as he said to the detective:

"John seems to have hidden himself away very well indeed, if the police, in a week, could not find his habitation. Don't you think so, Mr. Carter? Well, then, if he could hide his residence, he would surely have hidden that paper as well. He would not have carried about with him such a valuable instrument in writing. I assure you, sir, I cannot begin to tell you the possibilities for wealth that lie in that document!"

"It must contain some very valuable secret," said Nick, apparently impressed by Badmington's earnestness.

"There are formulas of discoveries in chemistry that will, I firmly believe, revolutionize some parts of our business—that will cheapen production and give incentive to the pushing of lines of goods that, heretofore, have been too expensive to handle with profit."

Mr. Badmington was enthusiastic, and as his en-

.husiasm waxed, his judgment and cautiousness waned. He was telling more than he should have told had not Nick's bit of flattery "got him going."

"John would never have risked carrying that document around with him," he went on. "In the first place, to carry the paper was dangerous. He might have foreseen the very thing that happened to him, if he had quarreled with this Hyburn. And to carry it around in his pocket would be wearing it out—would be aiding in effacing the characters——"

"Is there no copy of this paper in existence?" interjected Nick.

"No."

"Isn't that strange?"

"No. The paper was in my private safe. John had access to the safe for another reason. Not until after he had disappeared did I discover that the document was gone."

"How long had you had it in your possession?" asked Nick.

"Does that enter into the inquiry?" asked Badmington, getting warm again.

"I would not have asked the question if there was not a good reason for doing so," declared the detective, in exasperation. "I cannot stop to explain each time why I ask a thing. I want to know this for the reason that if you had had it long, somebody beside your brother John might have seen and understood the significance of the document, and somebody else might have taken it, and not the dead man at all."

"Ingenious, but impossible!" declared Badmington shortly.

"Yes?"

"I had not had the paper long. Nobody but John and I knew of its whereabouts. And it had been in the safe only a day and night."

"When John went away?"

"Yes."

"And you are satisfied that your brother stole it?"

"He carried it off with him—yes. I do not like to use the word 'steal' under the circumstances. Poor John is dead!" declared Badmington, with so much hypocrisy that Nick wanted to kick him.

"And you are likewise satisfied that Hyburn did not find the document on John Badmington, when he killed and robbed him?"

"I am."

"Why are you so positive?"

Nick shot the question in at him so suddenly, and with such sharpness, that for once Rufus Badmington was startled and confused.

"I—I have my reasons——"

"State them!" Nick commanded him.

Badmington hesitated, grew more confused, and was at a standstill.

"I want to know, Mr. Badmington," exclaimed Nick, without giving him time to put a brake on his emotions, "I want to know if you have seen this Hyburn since his arrest."

"I—I——"

"Answer me immediately, please. And, of course, you must know that, if you did have an interview with him, I can easily find it out by asking at the Tombs prison. They will refuse me nothing there, and a record is taken of every visitor who comes to see a prisoner—especially as important a prisoner as Milton J. Hyburn."

"Why, Mr. Carter," began Badmington, trying to get back his *sang-froid*, "you speak as though it would be a crime for me to see Hyburn."

"Answer. Did you see him or not?"

"I did."

"Was your object to learn if he had secured this paper that you had reason to believe John Badmington possessed?"

"Yes."

"Did you have any other reason for seeing the prisoner?"

"No."

"What was the result of your visit to the Tombs?"

"I was convinced the fellow did not have the paper and did not know where it was."

"Why?"

"He showed such strong animosity toward me," said Badmington. "Had he secured the paper he would have spoken and looked at me differently."

"Even were he crazy?" interposed Nick.

"He isn't so crazy that he doesn't know which side of his bread his butter is on," said Badmington.

"However, you are assured that he knows nothing about the paper?"

"He certainly does not know where it is."

"And I ask you again, do you suspect where your brother put it?"

"Ye-es."

"Then why do you want me to hunt for it? Can't you do as well yourself, if you have a clue?"

"I want you really to find the place where John had been lodging when he was killed."

"Oh!" said Nick, seeing a great light. "It is not the paper you expect me to get for you?"

"Not—not exactly."

"But you think it must be hidden in the room your brother occupied?"

"And not exactly that, Mr. Carter," said Badmington, with a sly smile. "But if you can find his hiding place, I'll find the hiding place of the document, I believe."

"That puts rather a different face on the matter, Mr. Badmington," said Nick thoughtfully.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I tell you frankly, sir, I am convinced that there is something queer about this mysterious document you so wish to find."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Carter!" declared Badmington loftily.

"Then I'll be plainer—but don't lose your temper. Here is my plain opinion of this affair: I think either you, or your brother, or both of you, came by that paper in a queer manner. I shouldn't be surprised if Hyburn had some sort of an interest in it. This may appear when the man comes to trial. However, it seems to be none of my business. You do not want me to make a search for the paper. You want to do that yourself after I have found out where John Badmington resided at the time of his death?"

"Yes," said the visitor, gulping down his rage.

"I'll take the case. It will cost you one thousand dollars. I will send the information to you at your office by noon to-morrow, Mr. Badmington," said Nick, rising. 'You can send me your check for the amount named in the morning mail. Good evening, sir!"

Joseph had appeared silently in answer to the summons Nick had given. Rufus Badmington found himself promptly and severely dismissed. He could not sputter; he could not retaliate with speech. Before he could express his disapproval in words, he had been helped into his coat by Joseph, the door had been opened, and he found himself outside Nicholas Carter's house!

CHAPTER IV.

THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST HYBURN.

"Chick!"

"Coming."

A portion of what seemed to be the end wall of Nick Carter's office—the wall against which the picture of a Greek slave hung—rolled noiselessly back, and in the opening appeared Chickering Carter, Nick's first assistant, notebook in hand, and a broad smile upon his face. He saluted his chief as he advanced into the office, and the screen rolled into place again.

"I take it that you missed none of that interesting conversation, Chick?" said Nick, with a smile.

"It's all here in good shorthand," said Chick. "I can transpose it for you at once, if you like."

"Not just now, later. There is a more urgent matter on which I need your aid."

"All right."

"You are, I believe, pretty well acquainted with the facts concerning the murder of John Badmington, and the apprehension of Milton J. Hyburn for the crime? I did not think it necessary to tell Rufus Badmington that I chanced to be the man who solved the mystery and captured the criminal."

"I saw he was uninformed on that point. McCaffery's gang are hogging it all, as usual."

"Well, we have the fun—sometimes the money. Why shouldn't they have the glory?" returned Nick, with a laugh.

"Well, I reckon I know a whole lot more about his brother's murder than this chap knows," said Chick, referring to the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington in a most disrespectful manner.

"You remember what happened upon the finding of the body by Coroner Niberg?"

"I reckon so, Nick. This Mr. Bronson Robbins Badmington mentioned was a personal friend of the police commissioner. He knew that the commissioner would be glad to know about the murder personally, as he is trying to get some real work out of those bulls down at three hundred Mulberry. And when Robbins called up the commish, the latter told him to keep it quiet, give it out that the man had dropped dead of heart failure, and to get the body quickly to the morgue. He thought if the newspapers did not get hold of it through the usual police publicity channels, there might be some chance of nailing the murderer quickly.

"But while those dubs stood around the dead man, his head and face being covered, there wasn't but one man came by, or asked about the thing. He was a rather peculiar-looking fellow with a green patch over his left eye, and he seemed curious about the circumstances of the man's death. Coroner Niberg didn't know enough to have this man, who had evidently been near the spot where the murder was committed and might have seen the murderer, detained by the officer as an important witness.

"But the next morning, when the commissioner put

the case in your hands, Nick, because he declared there was neither a clue to the dead man's identity nor to that of the murderer, you put your finger at once on the man with the green patch on his eye."

"Quite correct, Chick," commented Nick.

"And you put a personal in the paper in Niberg's name calling for that man with the green patch to come forward."

"I did."

"And you certainly got me going on that thing, too, Nick!" exclaimed his assistant, "for you asked in your advertisement for a man with a green patch on his right eye, when all the other witnesses declared he had worn the blinder on his other lamp. You certainly got my goat at first, until I saw that you suspected the man, and that the personal was a trap for him if he was crooked."

"You are right. I had the suspicion, but no way of verifying it."

"The fellow proved himself crooked, however, for, although he showed up to see what was wanted of him by the coroner, he had painted a fine black eye for himself—and it was his *right* one! Your suspicion was strengthened."

"It was," said Nick. "But I had nothing definite yet."

"That's right. Nobody knew who the dead man was. This fellow with the green patch denied having ever seen him before, and he told a pretty straight story himself—at least, one that could not be gainsaid."

"You are right, there, Chick!" commented Carter, with a smile. "I was puzzled."

"And then you did one of the smartest things I ever knew you to do, Nick, and turned defeat into success! You deliberately made up in the guise of the murdered man, put on the poor fellow's clothes, and walked about on the streets where you were apt to meet, unexpectedly, people who might have known him. Especially did you hope to meet this Milton J. Hyburn, the man with the green patch, and see if he would be shocked by your appearance."

"You met him. Your suspicions were verified. Hyburn was scared stiff. You arranged to appear before him often, and within half a day you broke the fellow's nerve down completely, and he confessed to you how and why he had murdered John Badmington."

"Right!" exclaimed Nick. "You have the story to a dot. And that brings us to this visit from the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington this evening, and the matter which he has engaged me to consider. Chick, I wouldn't trust that man as far as I could throw the Singer Building!"

"And my opinion coincides with yours, chief," declared Chickering.

"Hyburn admitted to me when he broke down that he had it in for the Badmingtons because they had got away from him, through specious promises, a document containing valuable formulas in chemistry that had been invented by his father, who was an experimenting chemist like himself. He, Hyburn, had met John Badmington, in the offices of the firm, and had believed him an influential and responsible partner. John Badmington had encouraged him to place the document in his hands.

"When Hyburn had gone to the offices again to meet the man, nobody knew where he was, and the responsible heads of the firm declared that they knew nothing about the document that Hyburn had intrusted to John Badmington. And he had never been able to catch John. They told him that the man was irresponsible, and that he often went away and remained for weeks, or months. After a time, when Hyburn had become importunate, they drove him out of the offices and threatened to have him arrested. Hyburn told me the truth," concluded Nick decidedly. "He was in earnest. He was done—and done badly—by somebody."

"It certainly would seem so," admitted Chick.

"And I am convinced now, after this interview with Rufus Badmington, that either the firm itself, or this pompous partner on his own responsibility, deliberately planned to steal the formulas from Hyburn."

"I'm with you there!" agreed Chick emphatically.

"John Badmington may have been the black sheep of the Badmington family; one thing sure, he was the scapegoat! I shouldn't be surprised if, because of his dependent position in the firm, he had often done Brother Rufus' dirty work. Rufus wants us to find the room where John Badmington lived when he was killed. Do you know what I think, Chick?"

"No."

"I do not think that we should be able to find the paper hidden in that room—wherever it is."

"No!"

"But somewhere among John's personal possessions his brother expects to find some memoranda which will tell him where the paper, stolen from Milton J. Hyburn, and of so much value in the business of the firm, is concealed. That is my belief."

"And you are really going to try to find the place where John Badmington lived at the time he was killed?" asked Chick curiously.

"Yes."

"And will you tell Rufus Badmington?"

"Surely."

"What for?" demanded Chick.

"For a thousand dollars," and Nick chuckled.

"He doesn't deserve to know," declared Chick.

"That may be. But he is entitled to his brother's personal belongings."

"But not to that paper."

"Perhaps not," admitted Nick.

"I don't care if Hyburn did kill John Badmington. I don't say he was justified; no man is justified in murdering another; but the paper belongs to Hyburn."

"True. But he can't find it. Nor can we find it."

Chick stared at his chief with dawning appreciation in his eyes. Finally he burst out with:

"I begin to see, Nick."

"I'm glad if you do, my boy."

"You are going to learn where this room is for yourself—for your own satisfaction—as well as for Mr. Rufus Badmington's?"

"Quite true."

"And he can pay for it!"

"Again you are correct."

"It's a good joke!"

"It's more than that," said Nick seriously. "It is the beginning, I believe, of a very interesting case. We might locate the room, but without Mr. Badmington's help I very much fear the hidden document would never be discovered. When Rufus finds that secret formula which belongs to Milton J. Hyburn, I propose to be in on the game, too!"

CHAPTER V.

A BIT OF DEDUCTION.

"If the commissioner's men haven't been able to find where John Badmington lodged," asked Chickering, "how do you propose to find out, Nick? And in so short a time? You told that man when he was here—Rufus Badmington, I mean—that if he sent you a check for a thousand dollars in to-morrow morning's mail, you would give him the information he seeks at noon."

"And so I shall."

"But you don't know already where John Badmington lived, do you?"

"I most certainly do not."

"Do you suppose Hyburn knows where the man was stopping?" asked Chick.

"I doubt it."

"But I'd like to know how you are going to work, if you mean to get the information before noon to-morrow," and Chick was frankly puzzled.

"I've tipped myself off to a certain thing," said Nick, with a smile. "I've been thinking since the day I masqueraded as John Badmington, how strange it was for me to have met nobody who knew him when I was traveling around in the Fifties. I hung about the Piedmont, where Hyburn himself lived, for a couple of hours, and wandered through the other streets until I was really footsore. Not a person recognized me. Chick, I think we all made a big mistake regarding John Badmington."

"What was that? He surely was at the park almost every day for a month—and Stemper swore he always entered by the gate opposite the head of Sixth Avenue."

"Quite true. And he came across from the head of the avenue as though he came up that street. And perhaps he did."

"Well?"

"But he may not have come up Sixth Avenue on his own feet!" said Nick, with emphasis.

"Wow, wow! says the fox," cried Chick. "I begin to see your meaning."

"Yes?"

"You don't think he lodged in that locality at all?"

"You've guessed it."

"Not in the vicinity of the park at all, perhaps?"

"That is true."

"Then," demanded Chick, "however are we to find his room at all? Why, the inquiry spreads enormously at once! And you told this Badmington you would get the information for him before noon to-morrow."

"Oh, you doubting Thomas!" said Nick, with a laugh.

"But I'm puzzled, chief."

"See here, Chick!" exclaimed Nick Carter. "Use your brains. Work it out yourself, in your own mind. See! What brought the man so regularly to the park?"

"Ostensibly exercise."

"Right! He was evidently close-hived somewhere and wanted a breath of air, and the exercise of his limbs. And why did he come so regularly?"

"Why—perhaps he was a man of habit. He might have believed he needed just so much walking every day."

"True. But why did he come to the same place, and in the same way, each day?"

"Ah! That is another question," grumbled Chick.

"Can't you answer it?"

"Central Park must have been the easiest open space he could reach, in spite of the fact that he did not live in its vicinity," hazarded Chickering.

"Right again!" declared Nick. "And how did he come to the park?"

"Why—er—"

"He was seen to come from the mouth of Sixth Avenue. And he always disappeared in that direction, too, when he had finished his walk."

"You suggest that he came on either the Sixth Avenue elevated train, or the surface car."

"I say nothing about the surface car. That is eliminated."

"Why?" demanded Chick, in wonder.

"Because he was noticed by Stemper to return into Sixth Avenue."

"To cross Central Park South, or Fifty-ninth Street, and enter Sixth Avenue, you mean? How does that make it so impossible for him to have taken the surface car?"

"Because if he had wanted a surface car running down Sixth Avenue he would not have found it necessary to cross the street at all," said Nick.

"By Joye! that's so, Nick."

"Of course, it is so. Therefore, I think Badmington reached the park and departed from it via the elevated train."

"That practically cuts the inquiry in half," admitted Chick slowly. "But I don't see but you must have some special knowledge yet, to discover whether he really took the train, and where he left it—at what station."

"The first is a matter of the memory of the day agent, porter, and ticket chopper at the Fiftieth Street station of the elevated line," said Nick quietly.

"Why the Fiftieth Street? Why not the Fifty-eighth?"

"There are few trains running on that spur from Fiftieth Street. Besides, as a shuttle train is usually run between the two stations, passengers must transfer at Fiftieth, and John Badmington would be obliged to stand about on that platform a good deal, and he would be noticed."

"I reckon you're right, Nick," said his admiring assistant. "Shall I go up there and pump those fellows?"

"No use at night. Wait until the day shift goes on at seven in the morning. You can go over there before breakfast, if you like, Chick, and your report will be the start of the real search after John Badmington's diggings."

Chickering Carter was at the elevated station in question early enough the next morning to interview both the night and the day agent. Sometimes they take each other's places, and Chick did not want to lose any chance of meeting the man who might remember the appearance of John Badmington as he looked on the day of his death.

The detective was armed with one of the photographs taken by the police of the dead man, and with an exact description of his appearance. The moment he showed the photograph and spoke of the object of his search the day agent said:

"That's the guy I was telling you about, Charley," and he spoke to the chopper. "I saw his picture in the paper, and I remembered him. So he was croaked, eh?"

"He was the victim of that murder in the park last week," said Chick.

"He was a nice old guy, too. Cheerful, and always gave me howdy when he come through. He did come up here and take a turn in the park, and then go home again, about every afternoon. Didn't he, Charley?"

The ticket chopper corroborated his statement.

"You have no idea where he lived, of course? He never told you, did he?" asked Chick quickly.

"Say! I know who could put you wise to that."

"Who?"

"Bennie Lowdney, who is guard on number thirty-seven. He'll be going through here in an hour. He was always talking with the old guy. He said so only yesterday. He recognized his picture in the paper, too."

"This Lowdney knows him better than you do?"

"Neither of us know him. But he often talked with Bennie coming uptown, or going down. Bennie knows what station he got on and off at. That ought to be some help."

"That's exactly the thing I want to learn," declared Chick.

"All right. I'll ask Bennie when he comes downtown. If you come back here in an hour or so, I'll tell you."

"Better still, I'll call you up from the house," said Chickering, and so agreeing, hurried home to meet Nick at the family breakfast table and relate his success.

Immediately after breakfast Chick phoned the man at Fiftieth Street and was assured that John Badmington had always boarded the train at Bleecker Street, and had left it at that point when he returned from the park. Of this, the guard, Lowdney, was positive.

"Then we will go to work at that point," Nick said briskly, to his assembled assistants, when Chick had made his report. "Danny will have the machine here in a few minutes. I phoned for young Pop-eye to meet us at Union Square, for I guessed John Badmington had lived some distance downtown, or he would have walked to the park, instead of riding there. There will be five of us to make inquiries—you, Chick, Patsy, Danny, and Pop-eye. We should be able to comb half a square mile, or more, in an hour. It's a case of a house-to-house canvass in that neighborhood."

"Bleecker Street is in the middle of a pretty crowded section," said Patsy Garvan doubtfully. "The Sicilian quarter is right there in McDougal Street, and there are enough Italians to make a small city of itself."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAIL TO ROOM 313.

After picking up his youngest assistant—the lad with the strange nickname of Pop-eye—Nick had his chauffeur drive straight to the Bleecker Street station of the road.

He figured that, if John Badmington had been so friendly in manner and speech with the men he saw daily up near the park, he would likely be remembered by the employees of the road at the Bleecker Street station. And Nick was not disappointed in that matter.

Two of the employees at Bleecker Street had already recognized the picture of the murdered man in the papers. But neither, of course, knew exactly where he lived. They knew that he must live near, for sometimes he would speak of having had a longer walk than usual in the park, and he was tired and was going home.

"Now, boys," said Nick briskly, to his associates, "our object is to learn where that 'home,' as Badmington called it, is. Here is the map of the district. Be sure he lived west of Broadway. Otherwise he would have taken the subway to the park—do you see?"

"And if he had lived very far west of this point," suggested Patsy, "he would have taken the Ninth Avenue elevated, and dropped off at one of the Columbus Avenue stations, for his daily walk in the park. That's a cinch!"

"Say!" interposed Chick. "He wasn't living far from the offices of Badmington & Badmington. I wonder that that brother of his didn't know it."

"Perhaps he remained near enough to watch his brother," said Nick slowly. "They certainly could not have trusted each other. And if John Badmington was the black sheep of the family, Rufus is the wolf in sheep's clothing!"

They wasted little time in discussion, however. The district for some blocks was apportioned to each, and even Danny put his machine in a garage and started out with certain blocks to investigate. No hotel, lodging house, or respectable flat building was to be passed by, and Nick arranged at the office of the garage where the car was stalled, that the reports should be received there over the phone. The searcher who found the clue to John Badmington's old diggings was to send in word, but remain at the house, and, if possible, in the room which John Badmington had occupied, until Nick came.

No two of the searchers would go about the matter exactly alike. Chick's method of procedure might be nearer Nick's own than any of the others, for Chick had studied the chief's moods and methods so long, and had been his close companion for so many years, that he had come to really look a good deal like Nick, spoke like him, and—which was not at all wonderful—thought like him.

Patsy's habits of thought were entirely different. He was keen, sharp to grasp a fleeting clue to a thing, and usually "jollying." He went on the proposition that a smile and a good-natured mien never cost a man anything in this world, and often gained friends and information, where any other manner would utterly fail.

Danny lacked experience, but he was as brave as a lion, and doggedly persistent. If Nick had told him to do so he would have started in at the Battery and inquired at every hotel and lodging house on Manhattan Island, from the Aquarium to the Harlem River, for the lodging of John Badmington.

Pop-eye—well, a word about that interesting youngster is necessary. In the first place, his optics fitted

his cognomen—and he seemed to have no other name. He was an Arab of the streets whom Nick had picked up on a former case. He was as sharp as the proverbial needle; young as he was, he knew the lower part of Manhattan Island as none of Nick's other assistants knew it, and he had a sight-acquaintance with a certain class of yeggmen and cheap criminals that had often stood Nick in good stead.

Pop-eye was devoted to the chief's interests. And he admired and respected Nick above any other man. It was for Nick's sake—to please his benefactor—that Pop-eye was going to night school, and when Nick had no use for him, he worked in a downtown office where his manners and his arithmetic were both being improved!

None of the five was more anxious to be first in the search than young Pop-eye. He had listened to Nick's instructions very carefully. When the chief let him go, he shot away to his section of the district without asking a further question, or wasting a moment.

A boy running in the street attracts no particular attention. And such a wise gamin as Pop-eye could slip in and out of places, and listen to conversations, and ask sharp questions of a good-natured bartender, or hotel clerk, or janitor—and altogether could cover twice as much ground in half an hour as a grown man!

And Pop-eye did not waste a moment. There chanced to be several men's hotels in the boy's patch—the class of hotels that have rooms from twenty-five to seventy-five cents per day, with a few better apartments for men who wish to live quietly and respectably, with the service that can be had only in a hotel and is not furnished by the ordinary boarding or lodging house.

Had Pop-eye ventured at first into the offices of these hotels he might, in almost every case, have been "bounced" without his questions being answered, or be delayed by interrogations from the clerks, or bell-boys, or others in so-called authority. And, of course, the managers would have refused to see him.

But that wasn't Pop-eye's way of getting at information. He was democratic in the extreme; and he knew that there were people about such hotels quite as observant, and quite as likely to know the guests, as the clerks and managers.

Pop-eye tackled the bootblacks and the porters. He had one of the photographs taken while John Badmington's body was in the morgue, and he showed this to everybody with whom he spoke. He did not ask for information of the man by name, for it was a foregone conclusion that John Badmington had registered at his lodgings under an assumed name.

Pop-eye "rubbered," as he would have called it, at the first hotel, and at the second, both without result, and then struck the third. This was rather a pretentious house, seven stories high, and with several rooms on the better floors to which were attached private baths. It was quiet and respectable, and a man could scarcely have found a better house in which to hide himself away if he so desired. It was called the Deccan House.

There was an Italian boy watching the bootblack stand—probably the porter's son—at the corner. Pop-eye sprang the police photograph on him first of all.

"Say, Giovanni, did ye ever see a guy dat looked like dis?" the gamin asked. "Ever shine his leathers for him—heh?"

The other looked the street boy over with scorn.

"My name ain't Giovanni; it's George," he said. "I'm as good an American as you be, you bug-eyed kid! And I can lick you!"

"Hullychee!" gasped Pop-eye. "You're sure a pepper pot. Never mind whether ye're Eye-talian, Hebrew, or what! I don't wanter fight—not now. I'm busy. If yer so anxious to pull off a scrap, help me out on dis job I got, and then I'll have time to fight youse."

"Huh!" grunted the offended American citizen in embryo. "You're a fresh kid."

"All right!" returned Pop-eye cheerfully. "Let it go at dat! But how about the gazaboo in de picchur? Did youse ever see his like before?"

"Yes," snapped the other, handing back the card.

'Say! are youse sure o' dat?"

"Didn't I tell you 'Yes'?" demanded the other. "You need a lickin', kid."

Pop-eye was sharp. He realized that ordinary tactics would not do with this chap. He looked at him and jingled some change in his pocket. Then he deliberately took out a half dollar and spun it in the air in front of the Italian youth. The latter's own eyes began to stick out.

"I reckon you be a good Yankee," grinned Pop-eye. "Yer know de coin when yer sees it—heh? Want to earn dis?"

"If I don't hafter work too hard," returned the other promptly.

"And if you'd stayed home in Sicily, you'd be chasin' goats over the hills for about ten cents a week,"

said Pop-eye, grinning. "Well, open up about dis guy in de picchur. Youse say youse know him. Who is he? Where is he? When did youse see him last?"

"And the money's mine?" asked the other lad.

"Surest thing yer know!"

"Then that's easy," and he grinned, showing all his teeth. "He's stopping right at this hotel. His name's Mr. Minturn. I ain't seen him for several days, but he ain't gone away yet. He's often stopped here before. When he goes away he always tips me a dollar."

Pop-eye, secretly delighted by this news, slapped the half dollar in the other's dark palm.

"Youse ain't so bad as youse seems," he said. "Tell me one thing more! What's the number of his room?"

"Ten cents more," said the other boy.

Pop-eye looked at him admiringly as he produced the dime.

"It ain't strange dat youse mugs git rich over here," he grumbled.

The other scowled at him again, but he kept his part of the agreement.

"Three hundred and thirteen," he said, his eyes flashing. "And I can lick you! You come around here again and I'll do it."

"And what are youse goin' to ask me for dat?" demanded Pop-eye, grinning, as he darted into the door of the hotel.

He came before the counter behind which the clerk sat, with a rush.

"Say, mister! Is dere a mug named Minturn stoppin' here?"

"What if there is, sonny?" was the counter question.

"I gotter message for him!" declared Pop-eye eagerly. "He ain't left here, has he?"

"Mr. Minturn isn't in. Will you leave the message?" said the clerk.

"I can't give it to nobody but him. When will he be back?"

"Couldn't say," returned the clerk languidly.

"Say! He ain't give up his room, has he—three hundred and thirteen, ain't it?"

"You have the number of his room right, and Mr. Minturn pays for it by the month," said the clerk. "If you want to deliver a message to him in person, come back again."

"When will he be here, boss?" demanded the gamin.

"I couldn't say positively."

"How long since he was in?"

"Oh, he's been away for several days," was the easy response.

To make sure, Pop-eye suddenly showed the clerk the photograph. "That's him, ain't it?" he demanded.

The clerk looked startled. Naturally the photograph of a corpse is not a pretty thing to look at.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded of the boy.

"Never mind. It's him, ain't it?"

"It—it most certainly looks like Mr. Minturn," admitted the clerk. "What is the matter with him?"

"Croaked!" replied Pop-eye. "Lemme use yer phone, will youse? If you'd been readin' the papers lately you'd ha' caught on dat your Mr. Minturn is de guy dat was croaked in Central Park last week—John Badmington. I wanter call 0670-Franklyn, and git Nick Carter on the wire. He'll wanter know erbout dis. An' youse had better keep everybody out of dat room three hundred and thirteen until he comes, cull!" added Pop-eye, with great importance.

CHAPTER VII.

CARTER "DROPS A STITCH."

In twenty minutes Nick was at the Deccan House, and, greatly to young Pop-eye's disgust, sent him to round up the others and call them off the search for John Badmington's lodgings. A word with the clerk, and another with the manager of the house who had been called, assured the detective that his youngest assistant had succeeded. "Mr. Minturn" was the ne'er-do-well brother of the pompous Rufus Badmington.

"I do not know why I did not suspect this," said the manager of the Deccan House, in talking with Nick. "I have read about that strange murder with especial interest, too. And this John Badmington—poor fellow—has been coming here, off and on, for some half dozen years. He was a quiet man and a good customer."

"Of the bar?" suggested Nick.

"I am afraid so. He had spells of heavy drinking—and he was the most unfortunate of all drinkers I drank alone."

"You are right there," said Nick. "I would like to see his room and examine his personal effects. Of course, nothing has been touched there?"

"Nobody has been in his quarters but the chamber maid to dust. Mr. Minturn always paid monthly, and in advance, for his room. He had just paid the second month of his present stay. Of course, we know nothing about him here—who he was, or what he did, or

how he obtained his money. The bar bills I insist upon having paid weekly."

"I see. Now, will you show me the room?" said Nick. "John Badmington's affairs were left in a much disturbed state, and I wish to look over his personal property, papers, and so forth."

"I presume that will be all right, Mr. Carter?"

"I assume the responsibility for doing so," replied the detective. "And I would request that, whoever follows me here to John Badmington's room, you say nothing regarding my examination of it. This case, sir, will not end with the murder of the unfortunate man and the punishment of his assassin."

"Being assured of your identity as I am," returned the manager of the Deccan House, "I see no reason why you should not do as you request, Mr. Carter."

He led Nick up two flights of stairs to the third floor. Room 313 was a large apartment at the back of the house, quiet, very well furnished, and with a bathroom attached.

"Mr. Minturn was about as shabbily dressed on his present visit to the house as I had ever seen him. Before, when he had been a guest, he had looked more like what he was—a gentleman. But he always demanded a good room and facilities for a bath. He was a gentleman, with the instincts and habits of a gentleman, even when he was drinking heavily."

Nick had promptly raised the shades at the windows and allowed the light to stream into the room. There was an iron bed in an alcove; a couple of comfortable, upholstered chairs, and a settee. The centre table had a green-shaded reading lamp upon it and there were several magazines and books scattered about, none of which, as Nick learned upon examination, had any name written in them.

The upholstery was in bright colors, that contrasted well with the perfectly plain and soberly colored carpet that covered the floor. This carpet was a particular good quality of Brussels, or Axminster.

There were several etchings on the walls, the bathroom was decently furnished, and on the bureau were the dead man's toilet articles—simple enough requisites, but showing plainly that they had been selected by a person of taste and refinement.

There certainly was a mystery about John Badmington's life and his attitude toward his family that had practically cast him off, which it would be interesting to solve. But that was at present not the point that interested Nick Carter.

He was here for an entirely different purpose. There were still two good hours before the time when he had assured Mr. Rufus Badmington that he would give him the information he sought regarding his brother's lodgings.

But before the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington had a chance to probe the dead man's quarters, Nick was determined to search himself for some trace of the missing paper that both the rich man and the murderer now in the Tombs had declared to be so valuable. He did not propose that Rufus Badmington should reap the reward of his wicked conspiracy that had resulted in the murder of his brother!

The bureau drawers in room 313 were well filled with underclothing and linen belonging to the murdered man; but not a scrap of paper could Nick find. He searched the books and magazines for some memorandum that might illuminate the mystery; but to no purpose.

The manager of the hotel had left him alone in the room, and Nick had locked the door. Now the detective examined every article of furniture, beginning with the bed.

He removed the bed coverings, shaking out each article. He felt the mattress, examined the spring, investigated the pillows; he unscrewed the brass knobs of the bedposts to see if there was a hollow in either of them where a paper might be hidden. And he withdrew the casters, too, to see if such a memorandum had been wrapped about the shank of one.

He probed the upholstery with a long and sharp needle; he stripped the table and examined the under side of the cloth to see that nothing was pinned to it; he searched the bureau in every part. The carpet covered the whole floor, and proved to be securely tacked down. But Nick went around the edge of the room on his knees and felt carefully for anything in the nature of a paper that had been tucked under the edge of the carpet.

He took apart the reading lamp; he removed the backs from every picture in the room; he unscrewed the traps in the window casings, which have to be taken out when a new window cord is put in, and searched the hollows behind them for any scrap of paper, or anything else on which could be scratched the information he sought.

Then he tackled the bathroom. It was tiled, and he sounded and examined every tile to be sure that one had not been recently removed and put back into place again. Taking off his coat, he stripped his shirt sleeve to the shoulder, and searched the water tank

for some sealed receptacle that might hold the missing memorandum.

There seemed to be no hiding place in the suite that Nick Carter did not probe; but to no purpose.

"Either the brothers had a very good understanding about how the memorandum should be fixed, or I have fallen down," muttered Nick, when he had convinced himself that further efforts would not avail. There was nothing else to search.

Nick replaced every article as he had found it, making the bed as neatly as the chambermaid herself could have done. He was not satisfied until every article in the room looked just as it had when he came into it.

Last of all he went to the window that opened upon the fire escape. This fire escape led to the court, which was was cut into the building to give these rear rooms light and air.

There was no possible hiding place out there for a memorandum, or a paper of any kind; but Nick was busy at the window for some minutes. Then he closed the sash, gave a final glance about the room to see that all was as it should be, locked the door again and went down to the office.

He confided to the manager that Mr. Badmington's brother would doubtless come himself, or send for the possessions of the dead man. At any rate, nothing must be touched in the rooms until either Badmington or the police should take charge.

It now lacked but a few minutes of noon, when Nick had agreed to report to the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington. Nick hurried around to the garage, where he found his assistants awaiting him. He chose Patsy for the shadowing of Rufus Badmington, and sent Chick and Pop-eye about their business Danny waited with the car and took the chief and Patsy down to the offices of the chemical company, where they arrived just as the noon whistles were blowing.

To Patsy, Nick gave certain instructions, and then left him to hang about the building occupied by Badmington & Badmington, until the brother of the murdered man should come forth.

Nick himself went directly into the offices, sent in his card to the head of the firm, and was immediately accorded an interview with that gentleman. Mr. Rufus Badmington was as pompous as ever.

"Now, tell me at once, Mr. Carter, have you fulfilled your contract?" he demanded, putting on his eyeglasses to scrutinize the detective closely. "I have done as we agreed. You got my check?"

"I did, sir," said Nick. "Thank you."

"But how about your own part of the agreement?"

"It has been kept."

"You mean you have discovered where my brother lodged?" cried Rufus Badmington, getting heavily to his feet and otherwise showing excitement.

"I have."

"Where is the place?"

"The Deccan House." Nick told him the street. "Room three hundred and thirteen. The manager is holding the room, and everything in it, at your disposal."

"Really!" gasped the astonished man. "I did not expect you would find it so easily."

"It wasn't easy. But I knew how to go about it, and I did not spare either men, or money," said Nick. "Every man to his trade, you know, Mr. Badmington."

"Do you mind if I call up this Deccan House?" queried Badmington warily.

"Not at all," said Nick, with a smile. "It would, perhaps, be well to verify my statement."

Mr. Badmington did so, and Nick heard him tell the manager over the phone to allow nobody in his brother's room until he had a chance to go there and examine his possessions in detail.

"Now, that is all right, Mr. Carter. You are quite as smart as they told me you were. I give you credit for that. But I do not like your manner of conducting your inquiries. You are too personal. You—you do not treat your clients with that respect that I consider my due."

Mr. Rufus Badmington puffed out his chest and glared at Nick Carter with all the rage that he had heretofore been obliged to suppress.

"But I get results, Mr. Badmington," returned Nick, with a laugh. "However, the dislike is mutual. Good day, sir!"

He walked out and left Patsy to "keep tabs" on the pompous merchant. Nick's opinion was that Mr. Rufus Badmington was a dangerous citizen—far more so than many a man then behind the bars of the State prisons.

The chief could trust Patsy to stick to Badmington like a leech and to send warning in season when the quarry went to the Deccan House. Nick had figured that this would be that very afternoon—before the head of the firm of chemists went home to dinner, at least.

After one of his aids had hung about the vicinity of

the hotel where John Badmington had lodged, Nick received notice over the phone from Patsy that Rufus Badmington was on his way uptown, evidently bound for his residence on Riverside Drive.

Nick went for his own dinner at Smith & McTeal's, arranging to have reports of Badmington's movements sent him there. And he called Chick into the case to relieve Patsy. There was no particular fumble on the part of either of Nick's assistants. Nick said himself, afterward, that he it was who had "dropped the stitch." He had not rightly gauged Rufus Badmington's cunning.

That gentleman drove directly home in his car, with Patsy on his trail in Nick's auto. When he thought his quarry was settled at least until after dinner, Patsy ran to call Chick. When the two returned to the place where Danny had been left in his car to watch, the young Irishman reported that another car had stopped at the Badmington house, that the proprietor had appeared instantly, entered it, and was whisked away.

Chick did a bold thing then. He walked briskly up the steps of the rich man's residence and asked the footman who appeared if Mr. Badmington was in."

"'E 'as just gone hout, sir," declared James.

"Can I reach him? I have a most important message for him. It must be delivered in person!" declared Chick.

"'E 'is dinin' to-night with the Twombly-Grants," declared James importantly.

Instantly Chick dashed back to the auto and the three young men broke the speed law to flinders in running across to upper Fifth Avenue, where the Twombly-Grants lived. Chick put the question to the "starched and stiff" who came to the door at that grand residence:

"Is Mr. Rufus Badmington dining with the family to-night?"

"He is not, sir!" declared the grim footman, and shut the door in Chick's face.

The latter saw that something was afoot that Nick should know about instantly. He ordered Danny to drive them to the nearest place where there was a telephone booth, caught Nick just as he was finishing his coffee in the restaurant, and told the chief how they had fallen down.

"All right! That old fox would have borne sharper watching," said Nick. "Come downtown here, all of you. Inquire for me at the Deccan."

But to make sure that their quarry was really not at dinner with the Twombly-Grant family, and the footman had been tipped to balk any inquiry, Nick, who knew Twombly-Grant himself very well, first called up the house in Fifth Avenue, explained to the valet who he was, and asked him to give his name confidentially to his master, and ask him to come to the phone.

In a few moments the gentleman responded, and Nick put his question.

"Quite right, Mr. Carter. Mr. Badmington was to dine with us this evening, and he disappointed my wife by phoning only a few minutes before the hour set that he would be unable to come."

Nick had his assurance. He realized as he dropped the receiver that he should have had a man on watch all the time at the Deccan House. He left the restaurant hurriedly, and fairly ran the short distance to the hotel where John Badmington had lodged at the time of his murder in Central Park.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FATAL ROOM.

There was a motor car waiting before the door of the hotel, and Nick was assured, without inquiry, that it was Rufus Badmington's. He did ask one question—of the boy at the bootblack stand whom Pop-eye had tackled earlier in the day—before entering the Deccan House.

"How long has that car been here, son?" he demanded, tendering the young Italian-American a dime.

"Pretty near half an hour," was the prompt reply.

"More than one man go into the hotel?"

"No, sir. Just one man. There was only him and the shover in the car when it stopped here. He told the shover to wait right where he is."

"Smart boy!" commented Nick, and he entered then, to find the manager of the hotel at the desk.

"Good evening, Mr. Carter," was the manager's greeting.

"Good evening," returned the detective briskly. "Mr. Badmington is still upstairs, I suppose?"

The manager looked a little queer.

"He—he did not say anything about expecting you, Mr. Carter."

"No? He overlooked that, I presume. I'll go right up."

"But he distinctly said to me, when I showed him the room, that I was to tell nobody he was here, and

allow nobody else in the room," declared the hotel manager.

"Oh, he forgot I was coming," said Nick boldly. "He did not mean to catalogue me with other people."

"I don't suppose he did, sir," said the manager, still dubiously.

"He didn't want the newspaper reporters troubling him, I suppose," was Nick's suggestion.

"Goodness! I hope this business will not make trouble for me in the newspapers," cried the manager.

"Oh, I guess not. I'll go right up——"

"I'd rather you wouldn't, Mr. Carter, without my first sending up word that you are here," said the manager earnestly.

"To Mr. Badmington?" demanded Nick, with apparent surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"But he is alone?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Quite alone. But he was very sharp upon the matter, Mr. Carter. I was to let nobody know he was here."

"I've got to see him, and I've got to go up to room three hundred and thirteen to do it," declared Nick shortly. "If you want to go ahead and announce me, sir——"

"I'll have to, Mr. Carter. I hope you excuse me——"

"Oh, that's all right!" snapped Nick. "I'll be right at hand. He'll let me in."

The manager called somebody to take his place behind the desk and started upstairs. Nick did not wait in the office—not at all! He was, indeed, right at hand, however, but stepped so softly behind the manager up the carpeted stairs, that his presence was not noted by that person!

The corridors were dimly lighted, and Nick flitted down them behind the manager like a shadow. The manager came to the door of No. 313 and rapped. Nick, glancing up at the closed transom, saw that a bright light was burning in the room.

The manager waited a moment, evidently receiving no reply, and then rapped a second time—sharper and more insistent. No response from inside the room.

"Mr. Badmington!" called the manager, in a carefully modulated voice.

There wasn't a sound in answer. There wasn't a breath of movement inside No. 313. The manager's rap became imperative, and his voice rose:

"Mr. Badmington! I say, sir; what's the matter?"

Suddenly Nick Carter pushed him aside. The manager did not even show surprise that the detective should have appeared so softly. He was evidently troubled by the silence within.

Nick stooped and peered into the keyhole. The key was there, and, of course, the door was locked. Nick's keen ear could not detect the faintest sound from within.

"Have you a pass-key? Stop! That won't help!" exclaimed Nick. "That other key has got to come out, or——"

Suddenly, like the manager, he was impressed with the significance of the silence in the room. He stepped back to the opposite wall of the corridor.

"This is no time for standing on ceremony, sir!" he muttered between his teeth.

He raised his right foot, poised it for aim, and then landed a terrific back kick, his heel striking the door just on the lock itself. Iron and woodwork were shattered, to the accompaniment of an outcry from the manager, but the door flew open!

The hard, white light of electricity from the chandelier lay grimly over the room. The table had been moved aside—so had the bureau. In fact, almost every piece of furniture had been displaced, but all in an orderly manner. The disturbance of the furniture did not suggest any struggle.

Yet a struggle had taken place. Death had been in the room, and that within the past few minutes, and the battle between that grim phantom and the man who now lay outstretched upon the floor had been a battle to the finish!

The man was Rufus Badmington. He lay flat upon his back, his legs drawn up convulsively, his head a little way under the bed that still stood in the alcove. His arms were outstretched upon the thick carpet, and his hands were half clinched. His face was slightly suffused; the eyeballs were rolled upward.

The manager reached the prostrate man first. In fact, Nick, after one sharp glance at the body, held back and searched the room at once with a gaze that lost nothing. With a cry, the manager had fallen on his knees beside the body and was pawing at the front of Badmington's clothing.

"He can't be dead! He can't be dead!" he cried.

"Don't move the body," said Nick. "This is a case for the coroner. The body must lie where it is until he comes."

"Oh! The man can't be dead! What does it mean?" cried the excited hotel manager.

"He is certainly dead," said Nick grimly.

"What does it mean? What has killed him?" blurted out the frightened manager.

"Your last question is unnecessary. I would not suggest it if I were you. I am no medical sharp," said Nick Carter bluntly, "but every appearance of the body denotes—apoplexy."

"Oh! He dropped dead?" cried the manager, much relieved, it was evident.

"It would seem so. The suffused face, the rolling eye, the contortion of the limbs—all point, I believe, to a stroke of apoplexy."

"It is bad enough! It is bad enough!" groaned the hotel man. "It will create talk. I suppose the stroke must have been brought on by excitement—the effect of his coming here to examine his poor brother's things. Isn't it terrible, Mr. Carter? Both men taken out of the world so suddenly. There would seem to be a fate in it."

"It is terrible, indeed," admitted Nick, who had not for a moment paid the manager the compliment of heeding his words. Instead, the detective was standing about in the centre of the room and examining floor, walls, ceiling, and everything within the apartment by his well-known method of sweeping the place with his glance as he slowly revolved. What he may have noted he mentally catalogued, but said nothing aloud, nor did his face betray any emotion. The manager rose from his knees and silently wrung his hands.

"You had better," advised Nick, "telephone for Coroner Niberg. By the way, tell him I am here and am interested in the case. I do not think it will be necessary to inform the police until the coroner comes. Let him do that. But, for safety's sake, you might send for a doctor in the neighborhood to view the body and give an expert opinion. A hundred doctors could not bring Rufus Badmington to life, however," added Nick to himself as the troubled manager darted out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DRAB THREAD.

Once alone in the room with the dead man, Nick Carter leaped to an activity that would have startled the troubled manager of the Deccan House. He went to work to investigate several matters which, he had seen, were of importance. He did not touch the body. He did not believe that anything about the dead Rufus Badmington had been disturbed. If the head of the firm of chemists had managed to find the memorandum left by his brother relating to the hidden formulas which the Badmingtons had got from Milton Hyburn, and had disposed of that memorandum about his person, there would be plenty of time to get it later.

The memorandum was not first in Nick's mind now. He went first to the bed, and, standing beside it, he scrutinized it for some moments. He had made that bed himself. He remembered clearly every fold he had put in the clothes, the very angle at which he had left the pillows.

The bed did not look, at first sight, to have been disturbed; but the case of the pillow nearest him was somewhat wrinkled, and did not stand at the head of the bed in just the way that its mate stood.

Nick looked from this wrinkled pillow slip to the man lying on the floor, and he nodded. Then he went to the window, which remained shut as he had left it just before noon, when he was last in the room.

But he opened this window without any difficulty. It was not locked. Nick was not surprised at this discovery, for he himself had placed the lock out of commission, half expecting that he might wish to reach the room by means of the fire escape.

Nick had been very careful himself, when he had stepped out on the fire escape on his first visit to room 313, not to leave marks on the painted ironwork. Now he drew forth his pocket lamp, snapped on the electricity, and examined the platform, the top ladder rungs, and the sill of the window. He nodded at last, came inside the room once more, and closed the window. He deliberately repaired the window lock, and left it so that an examination would prove that the casement could not have been opened from without!

He looked into the bathroom, which was likewise lighted, but gave that only a glance. Then he got down on his knees and began to creep about the room, especially under the window which opened upon the fire escape. He even examined certain parts of the thick-ply carpet with a magnifying glass.

Finally he approached the body of Rufus Badmington, and knelt beside it. The corpse was stiffening rapidly. Nothing had been done to compose the limbs, nor did Nick do that reverent office now.

Instead, he began to examine the half-clinched hands of the man, stooping close to them, even using his glass to examine the finger nails. Both hands received the same treatment from the detective. Without handling or disturbing the body to any appreciable degree, Nick now, with the magnifying glass in his eye, peered closely at every part of the dead man's clothing that was visible.

On the right shoulder Nick found a rather long black hair. It was a coarse hair, and did not match the iron-gray locks, which were a distinguishing feature of Rufus Badmington.

But when the detective compared this hair with that of the dead man's mustache, there could be no doubt but that it had fallen from that hirsute adornment. It smelled of brilliantine when Nick sniffed at it, and it was evidently dyed, like the mustache, for the root of the hair was gray.

There was a small scratch on the right hand of the corpse; but after a close scrutiny Nick decided that that scratch had been received some hours before. There was not a spot upon the white vest, nor upon any of the man's garments that Nick could see. Even the puff tie he wore was not greatly disarranged, and a ruby-and-diamond pin sparkled in it.

He listened at the watch pocket, and heard the timepiece ticking sedately away. It would seem that the man's fall had not damaged the timepiece.

Nick was about to rise to his feet again when his eye caught sight of a single thing that was out of place. The left shirt cuff on the dead man was exposed for nearly its entire width, the coat sleeve having been pushed back in his death throes. The cuff button was a heavy, plain gold button, with what is called the "Tiffany finish." It fitted close to the cuff, and between it and the linen was fastened a bit of drab thread, perhaps three inches in length. It was a thread of wool. It was entirely out of place attached to this dead man's cuff button.

Rufus Badmington had undoubtedly come fresh from his valet's hands to this rendezvous with death in the room his unfortunate brother had occupied. The valet would not have overlooked a thread like this drab one attached to the gold button. Nick was quite positive that the thread must have been caught between the button and the cuff since Badmington left home—probably since he entered this room.

Nick removed the thread and placed it carefully away in his wallet. He had just risen to his feet when there were steps and voices in the corridor warning him of the approach of the manager and others. The detective had just time to seat himself comfortably, and at some distance from the corpse, when the newcomers entered.

The doctor had come—a young man who had an office in the neighborhood and labored among the poor almost exclusively. He was a brusque, busy man, and he, like Nick, diagnosed the case at a glance.

"Apoplexy. Who is the man?" he asked.

Nick told him.

"The case will have to be reported to the coroner, of course; but he will merely repeat my decision. It is no police case, for which you will be glad," the doctor added, looking at the troubled manager of the hotel. "Phone me when the coroner arrives if he wishes to see me. Good night, gentlemen!" and the busy physician hurried away.

"It is a relief," admitted the manager to Nick, referring to the fact that the police were likely to be excluded from the case. "But it will make talk in the newspapers—it is bound to!"

"Oh, of course," said the detective. "You can't help that. You sent for Niberg, I suppose?"

"Yes. And he happened to be downtown with some friends. His secretary said he'd get him on the wire and send him right over here. That must be him now! The doctor might have waited."

It was Coroner Niberg who had, quite by chance, been really the starting point of this whole Badmington mix-up, for he it was who had found John Badmington lying dead under the archway of the bridge in Central Park.

The coroner was a little man, with a great deal of dignity and more nervousness. But he had been encouraged before by Nick to let matters take their course; and he was not averse to agreeing now, when the detective had held a short private conference with him, to take a snap judgment on the affair, and agree with Doctor Poline's diagnosis, that Rufus Badmington had come to his death from a stroke of apoplexy.

"And it is not at all improbable that is exactly what happened," was Nick's secret comment when Niberg agreed on this report.

Meanwhile the detective was enabled, through the coroner's courtesy, to get a glimpse of everything in the dead man's pockets. No paper containing the memorandum Badmington had sought was to be found. Had he found the precious paper? If so, had he memorized the message from his dead brother's hand and then destroyed it?

This was not at all improbable, and the thought troubled Nick greatly.

It may have been, however, that the man was stricken before he had found the memorandum left by John Badmington. If it was apoplexy that killed him, the stroke might have felled him to the floor of the room while he was still in the act of searching for the hiding place John Badmington had chosen for the memorandum.

And Nick Carter had searched that room himself.

Where could Rufus Badmington have looked that the detective had not examined first?

There was, too, a thought in Nick's mind that could not be put to sleep—a suspicion that could not be quenched. And as soon as Niberg had agreed to allow the body to be moved by an undertaker, and the dead man's family informed, Nick went to work to prove, or disprove, the theory that had sprung to life, in spite of his better judgment, in his brain.

He could not lock the door of the room where the dead man had been found, and the people in the hotel were very curious and wished to see it.

Knowing that his car, with Chick and Patsy, besides the chauffeur, would be at the door of the hotel before this time, Nick sent a bellboy down for Danny. When the young Irishman arrived, the chief put him on guard in the room, and told the manager that, for the present, not even he was to be allowed in 313, or the bathroom connected with it.

"But why is that, Mr. Carter?" demanded the hotel man excitedly. "When Coroner Niberg says there is no reason for the police to be called, I want to know why you interfere."

"You would rather have a private inquiry carried on in your house than a public one, wouldn't you?" demanded Nick.

"Ye-es."

"Then be patient. Remember the personal effects of John Badmington are still here. We cannot lock the door. My man will stand guard for the present. Clear the corridor and let people understand that three hundred and thirteen is shut against them."

Nick hurried down to the street, and found Chick and Patsy anxiously waiting for him, and full of apologies for losing their man uptown.

"Don't blame yourselves, boys," said Nick. "I told you that before. If anybody is to blame, it's myself. But I feel as though this was where Fate stepped in to balk us. I only hope that no irreparable damage has been done by the slip-up."

"The man is dead," grunted Chick.

"Very much so. But if he did not find, memorize, and destroy the memorandum John Badmington made of the hiding place of those formulas, we have a fighting chance to win them for Hyburn yet."

"You're taking a whole lot of trouble for that fellow—and he's an assassin," complained Patsy.

"But he was cheated—wickedly cheated," declared Nick. "Right is right. To succeed in bringing truth to light and aiding justice in her final round-up of this case is incentive enough for me!"

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN IN THE COURT.

Nick Carter's mind was fixed now upon a single phase of the episode. Some traces he had found in the fatal hotel room had brought him down to the street on a still hunt. He left his assistants still "cooling their heels," as Patsy expressed it, in the automobile, while he followed out this thread of clue.

First of all, Nick gained the assistance of the young Italian at the bootblack stand. Nick came to him with a dollar note, and hired his time for the next hour. It was too late to do anything in the bootblacking line, anyway.

"Take me into the court—the big air shaft, I mean—of the hotel," commanded the detective.

"The cellar door is locked, boss," declared the boy. "You'll have to get the key of Mr. Scully."

"No other way to get into it?"

"You can't get out through the windows on the first floor. They're barred."

"Isn't there a way to get into it from the alley?"

"That gate is padlocked," returned his informant.

"Never mind. Let's have a look at it."

"If Scully catches us around there, he'll raise a row," said the boy. "And he's a fighter."

"Who is this Mr. Scully?" asked Nick.

"He's the boss of the porters—the superintendent, they call him. He come pretty near having a feller locked up this afternoon for hanging around the alley. And the feller wasn't doing anything."

"When was this?" asked Nick keenly.

"This afternoon. Just before dark. He was just as well dressed as you are, boss, and I don't believe he was doing any wrong. He just walked through the alley two or three times, and Scully seen him. He rushed out of the cellar and grabbed the fellow, and was goin' to hand him over to a cop. The fellow was frightened. Scully is twice as big as him, and he's a mean man, too."

"What sort of looking fellow was this one Mr. Scully grabbed?" asked the detective.

"He wasn't near as big as you," said the boy. "Mebbe he was most as tall. But Scully could lick him easy."

"What did he look like in the face?"

"He had a little mustache, and his face was sort of pimply. His hair was light-colored. I dunno how he looked, more'n that. But his clothes was nice-looking."

"Well, let's have a look at the padlocked gate around in the alley. We'll risk Scully seeing us," said Nick.

The alley behind the hotel was a dark place, for, although there was a street lamp set at either end of it, there was mighty little illumination reached it from either the hotel or the buildings upon its other border. And it was not more than ten feet wide.

In the middle—halfway from street to street—there was a black pocket of shadows, and here was the court that cut into the huge hotel building to supply air to the inside rooms of the hostlery. A fence of wrought iron, ten feet high, in which was set a narrow gate, closed the mouth of this court from the alley.

It was true the gate was padlocked, but an active man could scale the fence, and drop easily into the courtyard. And Nick proved to be that active man—against the advice of the boy who accompanied him.

"Scully'll raise a row!" declared the youngster.

"All right. Let him," chuckled Nick. "You wait right here and you'll see it."

The detective drew forth his hand light and began to examine the bottom of the court. It was not more than fifteen feet square, and the fire escape balconies rose, one above the other, on all three sides.

There was not much rubbish in the place, but there seemed to be considerable crumbled plaster that had been thrown out when some ceiling, or wall, was being repaired. Wherever Nick walked he felt it crunch under his feet.

There was a well-braced iron ladder hanging from the fire escape on each side of the court. Nick gave his most serious attention to the bottom rungs of these ladders.

Now, the ladders and balconies of the fire escape had been treated to a coat of red paint not so long before. There surely was no particular reason why the fire escapes should be used commonly by either the guests or employees of the hotel, and if Scully, the superintendent, was so strict, none of the porters or bellboys would be likely to venture into this court.

But Nick found, on one of the ladders, the unmistakable marks of boots which had climbed upward, and perhaps descended again. The paint was scraped off the rungs in several places—and the scraping had been done recently. The metal beneath the paint was still bright.

This ladder led to the series of fire escapes upon which one of the windows of 313 opened.

"And I left that window unlocked myself!" muttered Nick Carter. "I wonder if I am not somewhat culpable? I intended to be on that fire escape when Rufus Badmington was searching for his brother's memorandum. I was not there; but was there somebody in my place? That is the question before the house at the present moment—and a mighty important question it is! There was a stranger, evidently without a valid object, hanging about this alley just before dusk. He could easily have come back, after being driven off by Scully, the superintendent, and under cover of the darkness of the alley, scaled the fence as I have.

"He could have climbed this fire escape just as easily as I intended doing, and entered room three hundred and thirteen by the window. This court is covered with broken plastering. I found bits of it trodden into the carpet of that room.

"Rufus Badmington may have taken an apoplectic fit, but usually such a stroke follows some great mental or physical strain—or some excitement. What happened in room three hundred and thirteen after Rufus Badmington locked himself into it? Did he find the memorandum where his brother had placed it? And, having discovered it, did Badmington suddenly discover, also, that he was being watched? Did he see the man at the window?

"After all, if that was the chance that brought on the stroke, I am rather glad the thing is no more on my conscience than it is. Had I suddenly stepped into the room and faced him, with the memorandum in his hand, the result might have been the same.

"I shall wait for the autopsy with considerable interest," quoth Nick, as he went back to the gate of the courtyard. "There are some peculiar things about Rufus Badmington's death that I would like to have explained. If this man—this pimply-faced individual—or another was in the room when Rufus Badmington dropped to the floor, what did he do? Was there really any struggle between them? Was it really apoplexy that killed the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington?

"That suffusion of blood to the face, and the uprolled eyeballs, could have arisen from plain strangulation. Of course, there was no mark on the throat, saving what the tight collar made; but one of the pillows on the bed had been disturbed! Was that done by Badmington, or by the other? If Badmington fell in any kind of a fit—not necessarily under a fatal stroke of apoplexy—that pillow held over his face for a few minutes would have accomplished the result.

"The query is: Was Badmington pushed into eternity? Was there a man there in the room with him

at the moment he was stricken, and is that man a murderer as well as a thief? And, did Badmington, or this possible man, get John Badmington's memorandum regarding the hiding place of the secret formulas? Rubbish," exclaimed Nick, drawing himself up on the fence preparatory to returning to the waiting boy in the alley. "I will be turning into a perambulating interrogation point!"

But of one thing the detective was assured: The pimply-faced young man who had gotten into trouble before dark by hanging about the alley would be a good man to round up and interrogate. Nick had the Italian boy repeat, for the benefit of Chick and Patsy, as good a description as he could give of the fellow, and before the chief entered the hotel again his two bright assistants had started to scour the neighborhood for news of the pimply-faced man.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADOW ON THE CURTAIN.

Nick went back to room 313 for a particular object. Having set Chick and Patsy after the only person upon whom suspicion could fall—the young fellow whom the bootblack had mentioned—the detective allowed his mind to take up another thread of the mystery.

Literally a thread. It was the drab thread that had been fastened to Rufus Badmington's cuff button.

Had the dead man's cuff got entangled in some part of the clothing of the unknown marauder whom Nick Carter suspected of having been partly the cause of Badmington's death? The nature of the drab thread seemed to preclude that.

And then, there had been something about the fingers of Rufus Badmington that had puzzled Nick, too. The man's hands were well manicured, and he certainly did no work to mark or abrase them; but his finger nails were dirty and the ends of his fingers soiled. There were plain evidences, too, of the irritation of the cuticle at the finger tips.

Although Rufus Badmington's clothing had not been particularly disarranged, Nick had noted that the knees of his trousers were very gray with dust. He had evidently been creeping about the floor of room three hundred and thirteen before the accident which had removed him beyond any possibility of being cross-examined again!

Nick, with the drab thread in his hand, stood in the room again and stared about him. Naturally he looked at the floor, for Badmington had certainly been creeping about on the carpet in his search for the memorandum his brother had hidden.

Now, Nick had gone all around the edge of that carpet himself, and had probed for the hidden paper. If it had not been secreted under the edge, where would it have been placed? Surely John Badmington would not have removed the tacks, rolled back the carpet, and laid the paper on the floor in the middle of the room!

If so, his brother had certainly not found the paper before his sudden demise.

But there was the drab thread—and suddenly Nick fell upon his knees and laid the bit of wool upon the floor. It exactly matched in color the groundwork of the carpet!

The figure, or pattern, which ran through the breadths of carpeting was bright and showy; but this background was a dull drab. The thread that had been caught under Rufus Badmington's cuff button was a raveling from the carpet.

But not from the selvage, or finished edge of any of the breadths. The warp of the carpet would not ravel there. There must be some place where the carpeting had been cut, and from the severed edge the raveling had caught upon the cuff button.

Rufus Badmington had possessed a certain clue to the hiding place his brother would select for the memorandum. That undoubtedly had been decided between them before John, the scapegoat, had disappeared with the valuable formula, stolen from Milton J. Hyburn, in his possession.

Rufus Badmington did not know where his brother had gone, it was true. He did not know in what safe place the paper containing the formulas would be hidden; that was likewise true. But he had known that his absent brother would make a memorandum of the above fact, for safety's sake, and he knew that John would not carry that memorandum about upon his person.

It had been agreed, in fact, just where John was to hide the memorandum. And Nick Carter now suspected that that hiding place had been under the carpet of the room where John had lodged. Wherever that lodging might have been John would have placed the paper in the same relative place.

With this tip the detective was not long in finding a slit in the carpet, about three inches in length, the edges of which could be easily lifted. His fingers found nothing under the carpet at that point now, saving some ravelings from the severed floor fabric.

These ravelings were exactly like the drab thread that had puzzled Nick. He was confident that he had solved that phase of the mystery, at least.

And Rufus Badmington had secured the memorandum. No doubt of that. Had it been so brief that he had memorized and destroyed it before he was overtaken by the catastrophe that had resulted in his death?

That was one chance. But if there had been another man in the room with Badmington, at the time he fell and died, the circumstances offered an entirely different explanation.

That unknown stranger might have been after whatever Badmington sought. Did somebody else, by chance, know what John Badmington had hidden in room 313, and what Rufus Badmington would be looking for?

If so, that man had stepped in from the fire escape at the critical moment when the head of the firm of chemists had found the precious paper, and had either demanded the treasure, or had snatched it from Badmington's hand. This deduction was simple enough.

Who was the man? Where had he gone? How had he secured knowledge of the secreted paper? Did he know its significance and value, and, with it in his possession, would he be able to balk Nick Carter's attempt to secure the lost chemical formulas for the man under indictment for taking John Badmington's life?

Nick had seen all there was to see in room 313. He had satisfied himself that any farther search there would add no item to his already clear understanding of the affair.

Musing thus the detective reached up and snapped off the electric light, preparatory to descending to the hotel office and giving room 313 over to the care of the manager of the Deccan House.

As the room suddenly became dark, and Nick faced the window on the fire escape, his attention was held by a shadow on the curtain of the window of a room on the floor above, and directly across the shaft from this in which the detective stood.

It was a man's shadow, and he was evidently dressing before the mirror in his room. The light was beyond him, and naturally cast a distinct shadow of him upon the shade.

The shades of room 313 were raised to the top of the casements. Nick had flung them up to get light for his own search of the room when he first entered it that forenoon.

He was suddenly smitten with the thought that, as easily as he could see the man dressing in this upper room, just so easy could the occupant of that room have seen him, Nick, when he was making his search of room 313 in the morning!

It was a stray thought; but even a stray thought is sometimes of great value. Instinctively his brain reasoned from cause to effect; the conclusions deduced might not always be correct, but they were always reasonable!

Who was this man, whose shadow he saw so clearly on the shade above? How long had he been in the hotel? Nick saw no harm in asking about it, at least, and he went down to the manager and sprung this question on him first:

"Can you show me a plan of the fourth floor of the house?"

"Why, Mr. Carter, all the floors are alike. The hotel was planned that way. Beginning with the second story, one floor is just like another, baths, linen closets, and all."

"Then let me see the plan of a floor," said Nick.

"Certainly," said the manager, and drew out one from under the desk.

Nick in a moment placed his finger upon the room, on the shade of which he had just seen the shadow of the man flitting.

"Who occupies room four hundred and thirty-three—directly across the court from three hundred and thirteen, and one flight above?"

"Why—what a strange question, Mr. Carter!" ejaculated the manager.

"Not so strange when you know what I know," said Nick grimly. "And if you want my question explained, answer it first!"

"I must look at the register," said the manager, evidently with his curiosity strongly excited.

He did so. In a moment he reported that the occupant of room 433 was A. LaSalle, of St. Louis.

"An old patron of the house?" asked Nick.

"I—I couldn't say. I don't remember the name—nor the man."

"How long has he been here, then?"

"Why, this is his first day with us!" exclaimed the manager, after referring to the book again. "What about him, Mr. Carter?"

"Let's go and see."

"What do you mean?" demanded the manager, his excitement momentarily increasing.

"I want to see what A. LaSalle, of St. Louis, looks like," said Nick briefly. "Will you go up with me?"

"More mystery!" groaned the hotel man. "You

will end in ruining our business here, Mr. Carter. People do not like to stay in hotels where men drop dead, and murdered men have lived, and all that. What does this mean?"

"Perhaps nothing. Perhaps a great deal. By the way—you have a man named Scully working for you?"

"Yes; he's in the cellar now."

"Send for him."

"Why, do you believe this LaSalle is a dangerous man?"

"I know nothing about him. Perhaps Scully does."

Much disturbed and puzzled, the manager sent a bellboy for the head porter. The man, a broad-shouldered, deep-chested, bull-necked fellow, appeared. He looked what he was—an ex-prize fighter.

"Scully," said Nick, when he was introduced to the fellow, "you had a bit of a rumpus to-day with a fellow who was hanging about the alley behind the hotel?"

"Not to say a rumpus, sir," returned the man, shaking his bull head. "He was a snipe that hadn't no business there. And he wasn't big enough for me to push his face in."

"This is the first time I've heard of it!" exclaimed the manager.

"Well, I sent him away. There wasn't no fuss. Why should I tell you?" demanded the man.

"You remember how the man looked?" asked Nick, smiling.

"He looked mad."

"I mean his appearance. What colored eyes and hair did he have——"

"He'd had a pair of handsome black eyes if he'd give me a word more sass!" declared the belligerent Scully. "But I reckon they was kinder blue—a washed-out blue! He had light hair and a wisp of a mustache. And he had pimples—an unhealthy-looking snipe he was."

"Let's go upstairs," said Nick to the manager. "Lead the way to room four hundred and thirty-three. I may be baying up the wrong persimmon; but we'll have a look at Mr. A. LaSalle, of St. Louis."

In silence the three filed up the stairs and finally stopped before the door of the room in question. The manager knocked.

There was a moment's silence in the room, and then somebody walked to the door, a hand was laid upon the knob, and, after a moment's hesitation, the key was turned in the lock and the door pulled ajar a little.

"What is it?" shrilled a rather squeaky voice.

Scully growled out an oath the instant he heard the man in the room. He pushed his bulk forward, threw back the door, and pretty nearly pitched the occupant of room 433 to the carpet.

"That's the guy!" declared the ex-prize fighter. "I didn't know he was livin' in the hotel—an' he never let out a peep about it."

"Sh! sh!" said the manager, for fear somebody near by would hear. "Come into the room—both of you! Let us understand what this means."

The man who had registered as A. LaSalle was not more than twenty-five or so, but he had a dissipated and unpleasant face, and a shifty, "washed-out" eye. He looked scared, too, but he found his tongue in a moment, and he used it glibly.

"You're the manager of this Deccan House, aren't you?" he demanded, trying to look indignant and injured. "I was going to say nothing about it, but I want to make a complaint against this fellow," and he pointed to the glowering Scully.

"I wish I'd pushed your face in—that I do!" growled the latter.

"Hush, Scully!" commanded the manager. Then to the patron of the hotel he said:

"Tell me what you mean, sir? We do not allow our employees to offend our guests."

"He threatened to have me arrested," complained LaSalle.

"He was nosing about there in the alley for no good. I believe he's a crook," declared Scully, his wrath rising.

"Now he insults me again!" declared LaSalle, injury written deep upon his unpleasant countenance.

"What were you doing in the alley?" asked the manager, with some suspicion.

"I passed through it looking for a rear entrance to the hotel. I am a stranger here, and thought there was such an entrance."

"You went up and down that alley half a dozen times; and you tried the gate into the courtyard. I tell you, sir," said Scully, "he was trying to get onto the fire escapes and do his little second-story act!"

"Be still, Scully!" exclaimed the manager.

Just here Nick Carter took part in the affair. He had been studying the shifty features of the hotel patron closely. Now he stepped close to the man and made him look into his own face.

"So you are A. LaSalle, of St. Louis, are you?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, I am," said the man stoutly.

"Did you ever hear of Pete Lorimer—'Slippery Pete' he has sometimes been called by those who know him well?"

"I—I don't know what you mean," gasped the other shakingly.

"You are Slippery Pete Lorimer!" declared Nick. "I know you now. I know that squealing voice of yours, too. You'll have to explain more than your reason for hanging about the alley behind the hotel. There are other things hanging over you, Pete!"

"I—I assure you, you're mistaken, sir!" cried the fellow, while the manager of the hotel caught Nick's arm and tried to draw him away.

"I beg of you, Mr. Carter, don't make any more trouble," cried the manager.

When the accused man heard Nick's name he jumped! His pimply face grew suddenly pallid. Nick shook off the manager's detaining grasp, but he seized the hotel guest by the shoulders and shook him as a terrier would a rat.

"You didn't know me, did you, Pete?" he finally cried, spinning the fellow across the room, where he fell on the bed, shaking and crying. "I'm Nick Carter. You won't gain anything by trying to bluff me. I'll get the truth out of you, if I have to shake you out of your skin to get at it! I don't pretend to say why you came to this hotel. But it is an old trick of yours to register at a house and then slip into the rooms and remove portable and valuable articles. Scully sized you up about right. But being here in this room you happened to look across the air shaft this morning, and you saw me searching room three hundred and thirteen for something—and you knew by the methods I took to go through the room that it must be something of great value. Eh? You saw me, didn't you?"

As the fellow remained silent and hesitating, Nick grabbed him again and jerked him to his feet.

"I—I didn't know it was you, sir!" gasped the crook, who could only be handled through fear of personal chastisement—a fact which Nick well knew. It is typical of that brand of thief to which Pete belonged. They are cowardly and sly, and can stand anything but physical punishment.

"But you did see me?" demanded Nick.

"Yes, sir! I saw you."

"And you saw I had been unsuccessful when I went away?"

"Yes-es. At least, I thought you hadn't got what you wanted."

"And you wanted a try at it? You figured it might be worth a good deal more than anything you could pick up in these rooms about you?"

"I—I—yes, sir!" said the fellow, as Nick started for him again.

"And you couldn't reach that room across the shaft by the fire escape from here. So you went down to the alley to see what would be the chance to get up by way of the court after dark."

"But this—this gentleman drove me away," stammered Pete, pointing a shaking finger at Scully.

"He did. But you came back after dark and sneaked over the fence and up the fire escape on that side of the court."

"Oh, no, sir! I never. I didn't do it, really, sir! Believe me, Mr. Carter, I ain't saying I wouldn't have copped any gilt there was loose—or anything else I saw that looked good; but I never was there."

Pete was growing excited; his face was pallid, his eyes rolled; he displayed every evidence of absolute terror.

"You weren't where?" demanded Nick quickly.

"In that room."

"What room?"

"The one I saw you in this morning."

"But you had it in your mind to climb up to it, force the window, and have a look about yourself?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I thought of it," admitted the crook. "But I didn't do it."

"You climbed over that fence just the same. You were seen!" declared Nick convincingly.

"I—I did go that far, sir. But then I got scared and went back——"

"Don't you lie to me!" cried Nick, with a threatening gesture. "You went up the fire escape. I found the marks of your boots on the ladder."

"I—I only went up a little way," gasped Pete.

"You went to the third story. I saw your footprints on the gallery outside the window of that room."

"Oh, no, sir!"

"And on the sill of the window!" declared Nick, with increased emphasis.

"I—I——"

"And you opened the window and went in."

"No, no!" fairly shrieked the fellow. "I couldn't open the window. It was locked."

"Lie to me, will you?" demanded Nick, and struck Pete with the flat of his hand, on the side of his head, such a blow that the blubbering fellow landed against the wall and sank there, crouching and sobbing.

"The window was not locked," declared Nick. "I saw to that myself. I left it unlocked in the morning. You opened the window and you jumped in——"

"No, no!" shrieked the crook, in a pitiable state of fear.

"You did. I found the plaster you had got on your feet in the courtyard trodden into the carpet. You entered room three hundred and thirteen, you scoundrel, and at a most auspicious moment."

The crouching thief only groaned.

"When you climbed to the fire escape you found that somebody was already in the room. The room was lit up, but the man had forgotten to draw the shades. He had moved some of the furniture, and was creeping about the floor on his hands and knees. Suddenly," added Nick dramatically, and standing over the thief, while he pointed an accusing finger at him—"suddenly this man found what he was looking for—what I had myself looked for earlier in the day. You did not know what it was, but you was sure it must be something of great value. You softly opened the window. You sprang lightly into the room. The man had got upon his feet, and he was studying the thing he had secured. So he had not observed you until you were in the room—perhaps not until you made a grab for the paper in his hand!

"But you did not have to struggle with him long for its possession. He fell over backward—perhaps without a cry. You secured the paper he had found. Then, you scoundrel, you took the pillow from the bed and deliberately pressed it down upon the face of the fallen man, and held it there until his breath entirely ceased!"

The manager had sprung back with a cry of horror; even Scully was swearing in an undertone and kept his distance from the sobbing and moaning Pete. But when Nick came to this awful conclusion, the crook leaped up with a shriek that rang through the room.

"I did not! I did not!" he cried. "The pillow was flung off the bed by the guy's hand when he fell. I never touched him. I was going to make him give up the thing he found—but it wasn't nothing but a paper with some words written on it. Here it is!" and he thrust a narrow piece of stiff parchment into Nick's hand.

"I never did the guy no harm!" declared Pete, with painful earnestness. "There wasn't no need. He got the thing out from under the carpet, stood up, and just as I jumped into the room he toppled over, knocking the pillow off the bed. It was a stroke. He wasn't breathing at all when I took the paper out of his fingers—I swear it. I picked up the pillow, and put it back on the bed. I dunno why I did it. I was too scared to know why I done anything. I just paddled back to the window, slipped out, shut it after me, and got down to the ground and out of the yard as quick as ever I could. Then I reckoned this would be the best place for me to stay—right in the hotel—till the thing blowed over."

Pete was so wildly excited, and so much in fear, that it was impossible to doubt that he was telling the truth. The fellow was so broken down by the incident that he made no defense in the case which Nick later brought against him, and the detective secured his punishment as a thief and dangerous character, to the tune of two years in the penitentiary.

But the mystery of the exact manner of Rufus Badmington's death was explained, and Nick Carter was somewhat relieved to learn that no carelessness on his part had aided in the catastrophe that had overtaken the rich man, just as he had grasped the clue he was sure would lead him to still greater riches.

The memorandum which John Badmington had hidden under the carpet in room 313 of the Deccan House read:

"RUFUS: It is in box 1812 of the Liberator Safety Deposit Company. No key needed. Combination set to 13-3-13. J. B."

"That settles the matter," said Nick, to his assistants when he had rounded them up and they were on their way home. "The formulas are safe in that strong box. They belong to Milton J. Hyburn. I will have a talk with his lawyer, and if the formulas are really of value, they can be sold and the money applied to Hyburn's defense. Though he is an assassin, there are mitigating circumstances in his case, and he should have every chance that legally can be given to save him from the electric chair!"

THE END.

The mystery, you will see, has not been cleared entirely; it looks as if those formulas, over which two men have lost their lives, are going to give Nick Carter a lot more work of the kind he does so well. You'd better get the next number (679), for the detective story it contains is of the sort you like to read. The tale is "A Live-wire Clue; or, Nick Carter and the Badmington Case." Of all the clues that detectives, famous or otherwise, have worked on, none was ever so strange as that which Nick Carter takes up in the next story.

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JACK'S GHOST.

The train was made up and standing in the depot. The "Old Seventy-nine" was coupled on, Johnny had "oiled round," and was now killing time with soft-hammer and monkey-wrench, looking over links, pins, guides, crossheads, and eccentrics.

Tom had put in a good fire, lit his cab light, and, as she now stood blowing off at a hundred and twenty, her bright headlight piercing the gloom outside, was busily engaged in giving a finishing touch to jacket and hand rails.

The conductor was fuming in and out the telegraph office, muttering anathemas against the connection, which was invariably late on his out trips.

The brakemen had their lamps filled and lighted, the bull's-eyes gleaming redly rearward, the fires booming—which made the coaches too hot for some and not hot enough for others—and were now grouped around the stove in the baggage car, listening to that veteran "smasher," jolly Jack Miller, who was making a "running switch" of a story about a brother brakeman, who some years previous ran on "the Central," and never allowed a trunk to pass through his hands without thoroughly testing the quality and durability of the material of which it was composed, and the excellence with which it had been put together by its maker.

"An' I tell ye, boys," said Jack, "it would have done your hearts good to see Bob handle them Sarytogys an' travelin' agents' iron-bound storehouses, as would take two men to roll into his car. He'd upend an' send 'em a spinnin' clean across the car, an' many's the sample an' sich he'd afterward pick up an' stuff back under the busted lid.

"Some says as how Bob went clean crazy 'cause he got hold o' a New York agent's 'keester' which he couldn't handle or bust, but I know better. Ye see he allers was a melancholy cuss, was Bob, an' durin' the war, when there was few trunks an' lots o' coffins goin' over the road, he got worse than ever; an' after that smash-up at Rocky Pint, when the lightnin' express was ditched, an' they had to pull him out from 'mong the corpses as had been knocked out o' their coffins, he swore he was a crooked link if he ever checked another run. It was bad 'nough to be smashed up 'mong the livin', but when it come to layin' fur four hours under a wreck an' feelin' the cold arms o' them corpses 'round him, he 'lowed it was a leetle too rough fur him. So he did quit, an' died a natural death a few years after at the Angola wreck as he was deadheadin' his way to Cleveland.

"I kinder think," continued Jack, "that Bob was a leettle skittish anyhow, bein' shut up all the lonely hours o' the night in a close car with corpses; but, laws, boys! I've got used to it, an' don't mind it a bit. All them old yarns 'bout ghosts, an' the dead comin' to life an' walkin', is most decidedly played out with me. When Dispatcher Death gives us a 'time order,' we've just got to make it, an' no broken links, nor pins, nor rails, will stop us. We can't put on no airbrakes, or reverse an' back out. Not much! An' when we reach the end o' the run, we'll be run in on a side track to lay until the General Superintendent issues orders to have us switched out for a general overhaulin' fur service on the road to everlasting happiness, or the road to perdition.

"I knowed a fool o' a baggage master once," resumed Jack after this exposition of his crude ideas of the inevitable, "who had a corpse put on to the platform next the tender, an' tied the handles o' the box to the hand rails to keep it from slippin' off. It was the night express, as made runs o' thirty an' forty miles without stoppin'. The very first place they stopped they found the cinders from the engine had set fire to the box, an' burnt it an' the coffin lid half off, leavin' the ghastly corpse, with flesh all sizzlin', in plain sight.

"It was a horrid spectacle! Ye see, the night being cold, all the windows and doors in the train was shut up, an' if anything was smelled it was thought to be from the engine. In course the fool 'got his time,' an' the company had to fork over to quiet the thing. Served the blamed fool right, too, fur bein' so scary 'bout corpses.

"But tumble out, boys! Here comes that snail connection at last, an' we're a good hour late."

Sure enough, it was coming, and in a moment was brought up standing in the depot.

Passengers were transferred, and the through baggage hurriedly checked into Jack's car, the last piece being a long box, which needed no second glance to discover that it contained a corpse.

The car was quite full, and Jack pushed it to the far end of the dark aisle between the rows of trunks, and piled the mail pouches atop of it, for this particular night both end doors were blocked up with baggage, leaving him barely room to "check up" and put his "local" out the side doors; he being a prisoner, as it were, in his own car.

The conductor's "All aboard" sounded as he pulled the bell-rope cord, Johnny "dropped her down in the corner," gave her steam, and in a few minutes we were dashing along, forty miles an hour.

We made a good run to N——, and leaving there were once more flying over bridges, through tunnels, around curves, and past waiting freights, when a shriek from the brass throat of our "Roger" called a stop, the airbrakes were applied, and we came to a standstill in a deep cut.

The conductor and brakemen rushed out to ascertain what the stoppage meant, and found the engineer talking to Jack, who had stopped the train with the bell cord, and was now declaring with pale face and trembling voice that the corpse was alive and had been pounding to get out.

The mail was pulled off the box, but as nothing was heard, Jack's story was ridiculed, and he was finally convinced that the noise was occasioned by lumps of coal thrown from the tender against the car by the rapid motion.

Amid much laughter at Jack's expense, the signal was given and on we sped again.

No more was heard from Jack and his ghost until we reached the next station, when he—Jack, not the ghost—came back, looking like a veritable ghost himself, vowing that "something was up," and that he would not ride in the car with that corpse.

"He commenced knockin' again, not a minute after we started up back there," said Jack, "an' kept it up until we passed the cut a half mile from here; an' every little bit I heard a muffled screech. I am just goin' to ride in the coaches 'tween stations, I am!"

And he did so, despite the jeers and laughter of the trainmen, who could not refrain from making allusions to "that melancholy cuss, Bob," and advising him to put the corpse on the front platform.

At D——, the car inspectors, in going their rounds, discovered a loose brake rod under the baggage car, and that the rocking of the car in rapid motion had thrown it up against the floor with sufficient force to start the boards.

This was "Jack's ghost," and to this day a loose brake rod is so called on that road.

"Ye may laugh," said Jack, "but the stoutest-hearted among ye would have felt just as I did about it. I was sittin' by the stove thinkin' o' old Bob—as I told ye on—an' how lonesome it was sittin' there near a corpse as might have died o' smallpox or yaller fever, fur all I knowed, when all at once I heerd a hard rap as seemed to come right from the coffin, then another, an' I seemed to hear screeches an' groans. Of course the knocks was from the rod, an' the groans was made by the flanges o' the wheels grindin' 'gainst the rails, but how was I to know it then?"

"But why didn't you pry off the lid of the box if you thought he was alive," the conductor asked, "and relieve him from his unpleasant predicament? Such things have happened, and you might have made quite a hero of yourself."

"That's just what I would have done, you bet your bottom dollar on that," put in "our Johnny," as he tipped a wink to the boys. "I would never have stopped the train until I got a look at him, anyhow."

"Yes, ye may talk!" replied Jack, with infinite scorn depicted in his homely face, and not dreaming that they were only "drawing him out." "Ye may talk, but there isn't one man in a hundred would have done any different from what I did. The bravest man in the world has a certain amount of cowardice mixed up in his composition, an' it only needs somethin' like this to bring it to the surface. My respected father—Heaven rest his soul—was one who was never knowed to flinch, an' he bore the marks o' wounds received in many a death struggle with the 'greasers' in Mexico; but he was scared nearly to death once by a corpse, an' the dear old man's hair would have turned grayer than a rat if it hadn't been already white, what little he had, from the frost o' three-score winters.

"A neighbor o' his took it into his head one smilin' day in June that this world was a fraud, an' he the biggest fraud in it fur presumin' to live an' havin' to work like a slave; so what's he do but ups an' takes a dose o' pizen, an' sets himself down in a corner o' his barn where he could die nice and comfortable-like. He was found there, in due course, sittin' up stiff, starin' the old cow out o' countenance, an' deader than a doornail.

"He was laid out, an' my old man was invited to 'set up' with him, which cordial invitation he accepted on. So he goes there after night an' sends all to bed, an' was sittin' half dozin', when all on a sudden he was roused by a tremenjus thump on the floor. Jumpin' up, what's he see? Why, old Smith sittin' up starin' at him with his stony eyes wide open. Dad give one screech an' lit out like he was runnin' a race with the lightnin' express. The folks heerd the old man yell, an' came down an' pushed the corpse back on the board, put the weight on him to keep him down, an' set up the balance o' the night themselves.

"Ye see the jints and muscles o' old Smith was stiffened in a sittin' position, an' when the weight slipped off, of course he set up. My old man was 'shamed 'nough when it was explained to him; but I say—as I do 'bout my affair—that any one else would have done the same thing under the circumstances."

A DARK COMPACT BROKEN.

It was in the month of April that the *Hound*, a small whaling brig, left the port of Valparaiso, to cruise off the Galapagos. The crew were all Chilians, with the exception of the two boat-steerers, or harpooners, who were from Nantucket. Both were strong, hardy fellows, who had been bred to the sea almost from their childhood, and who knew how to handle "the barbed iron" in the proper manner. They had spent so much of their time on the South American coast that they could speak the language of the natives fluently; and having dusky brown faces, high cheek bones, black eyes, and raven hair, they might have passed themselves for Chilians without difficulty.

They were sworn friends. When boys, they had sailed away from their native land, and they had remained together ever since—a period of fifteen years. They resembled each other in personal appearance and in some other respects; but in all things except their love for the sea and certain nautical propensities, their tastes and habits differed.

Tom Winthrop, the eldest, was very lively, fond of singing, dancing, and jesting; the other, Hal Gardner, was gloomy and reserved. As often happens, this difference strengthened the links of affection between them. Their friendship was almost equal to that of Damon and Pythias. Both the young sailors were eccentric, and, what is uncommon among the good, matter-of-fact people of Nantucket, they were a little romantic, as was shown by the singular agreement—made and sworn to between them after leaving Valparaiso—that, should one meet with his death in any manner whatsoever, the other would follow him to the "Valley of Shadows" as soon as possible, by killing himself with his own hand. The idea of this strange compact was suggested by a presentiment of Gardner's just after the friends had put their names on the shipping book, that he was destined to be killed during the brig's cruise, though in what manner he could not say.

Laughed At the Signals.

Tom Winthrop, while he ridiculed the presentiment, had not hesitated to propose the agreement. It was drawn up in writing, with red ink, and signed under a representation of two crossed harpoons.

One evening, about fifteen days after the sailing of the brig, Winthrop was walking in the waist, when he thought he saw his friend come up from the steerage, and mount the main rigging. From the fettock shrouds the mast, with its hamper, sails, etc., was hidden by a thick fog, upon which the lantern, hung on one of the backstays, shed only a faint gleam. Consequently, the ascending figure was soon shrouded from Winthrop's view. He sprang to the rail, however, and shouted the name of his friend.

"What in the world are you doing up there, at this hour?" he added.

No answer was returned. Winthrop repeated his question; still there was no reply.

Not a little surprised, the young sailor now sprang into the rigging, and proceeded to ascend it. He mounted to the truck, but saw no human being; when, wondering how he could have been so strangely deceived, he returned to

the deck, and questioned the helmsman with regard to the vision.

The Chilian had seen it, too; he could swear to it. It was just as the clew of the maintopsail began to shake. He glanced up, and saw the figure plainly enough before it vanished in the fog.

"Perhaps something has happened to poor Hal!" cried Winthrop, in whose mind a wild sea life and ignorant sailor associates had not failed to breed superstitious fancies.

He rushed into the steerage and pulled aside the curtain of his friend's bunk, when, to his dismay, he perceived that the bed was empty, and the sheet and pillow stained with dark red spots.

"Blood!" he gasped. "What has become of my poor friend?"

He returned to the deck, and related what he had seen to his shipmates of the watch, all of whom were much startled by the recital. They were of the opinion that the figure seen by Winthrop and the helmsman was, indeed, the spirit of the poor boat-steerer, come to announce his fate to his friend, but unable to do so, owing to some mysterious cause.

"I heard a splash about half an hour ago," said the cook; "so that I now have no doubt that it was made by poor Hal; although when I looked over the rail, at the time it happened, and saw nothing but the water, I concluded that the sound was caused by the 'jumping up' of some fish. It's evident now, by the blood in his bunk, that Hal committed suicide, by first cutting himself with a knife, and then crawling through the porthole and dropping into the sea."

Ready for the Compact.

This seemed to be the prevailing opinion throughout the brig, when all hands were aroused and questioned, and the cook's statement and Winthrop's were repeated.

"Gardner was always a strange lad," said the captain, "and I've heard him declare that should he ever feel tempted to commit suicide, he should first use a knife, and then drown himself."

"Ay, ay!" cried Winthrop wildly; "so he has often talked to me. There can now be no doubt of his death, and I am ready to fulfill our compact."

So saying, he drew his sheath knife, and was about to plunge it into his throat, when the captain seized his arm.

"Nay, nay!" shrieked the young man; "let me go to him! Let me go join my friend, as I agreed to! I will go, in spite of you all! I must go!"

With a powerful effort, he broke from the captain's grasp; again the knife was raised, when it was seized by a strong hand from behind, while a well-known voice exclaimed:

"Forbear!"

Winthrop turned, to be embraced by his friend, who proved himself very much alive and in good health by the strength of his clasp.

Explanations followed, in a few words.

While sitting in his bunk, writing with red ink, contained in a large bottle, the latter was overturned, spilling its contents over pillows and sheet. Not caring to lie in a pillow thus saturated, the young sailor, after finishing his letter, ascended to the maintop, intending to sleep there during the rest of his watch. Finding the place clogged with coils of rope, however, he concluded to go to the foretop, which he knew contained plenty of spare canvas. Accordingly he did so, passing from one mast to the other by means of the maintopmast stay. Waked, after he had fallen asleep in the foretop, by the earnest voices of his shipmates beneath him, he descended—as we have shown—in time to save his friend.

The two men to whom this story relates are still living. Both being now married, and both having children, their strange compact has been annulled by mutual consent.

PROFESSOR LOMBROSO'S CHARACTER.

One side of the late Professor Lombroso's character little known to outsiders made the great Italian student of criminology adored by his children, especially his two daughters, who looked after him as though he were a child.

His two greatest domestic characteristics were disregard of appearances and absent-mindedness. When he was invited out in the evening it was the work of two or three days to get him keyed up to putting on his dress clothes, and even then he was capable of weakening at the last moment and going out just as he happened to find himself.

His absent-mindedness was so great that when under the care of the home circle he never attempted to look after the money and would even leave the house to go shopping without ever looking to see if he had his purse with him. Naturally when he traveled the consequences for his pocket were disastrous. He invariably arrived home without a penny, no matter how much he had taken away with him, having either lost it or had it stolen.

In Vienna once he lost his purse, which frightened him so that when he recovered it he resorted to the expedient of dividing his funds into various small sums which he concealed about his person in all kinds of unlikely places, so that at least he could not lose it all at one time. There was a note in the lining of his hat, another in his boot, several pinned to his shirt, and so on, but notwithstanding this he arrived home in his usual penniless condition.

LUXURIOUS PRISON IN JAPAN.

The most luxurious prison in the world is in Japan, about fifteen miles from Tokio. In the midst of the gardens, where flourish medlars and cherry trees, where are seen ornamental ponds with water lilies, arises the palatial prison.

The cells are spacious and airy. The lighting throughout is by electricity, and the apartments are furnished luxuriously. Bathrooms with marble baths, hot and cold water being laid out, dressing rooms, and reading rooms—nothing seems to be wanting to make the sojourn in this prison pleasant. In fact, it seems an ideal country residence, scarcely calculated to reduce crime.

A RESOURCEFUL SWEETHEART.

When young Mr. Squiggs was on his way to take a suburban train the other evening he carried a box of candies in one hand and a package of meat in the other.

"Hello, Squiggs!" said an acquaintance. "Have you begun housekeeping? I didn't know you were married yet."

"Neither I am."

"Well, what are you doing with those candies and the meat?"

"Going to see my girl in the country."

"Do you have to supply the family with meat already?"

"Not exactly. The candy is for the girl and the meat is for the watchdog. You see, I have to be on good terms with both."

OBEDIENT TO THE LAW.

"Why did you let him get away from you?" thundered the chief.

"He—er—took a mean advantage of me," replied the green detective. "He ran across the grass in the park and——"

"Well?"

"Well, there was a sign there, 'Keep off the grass.'"

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